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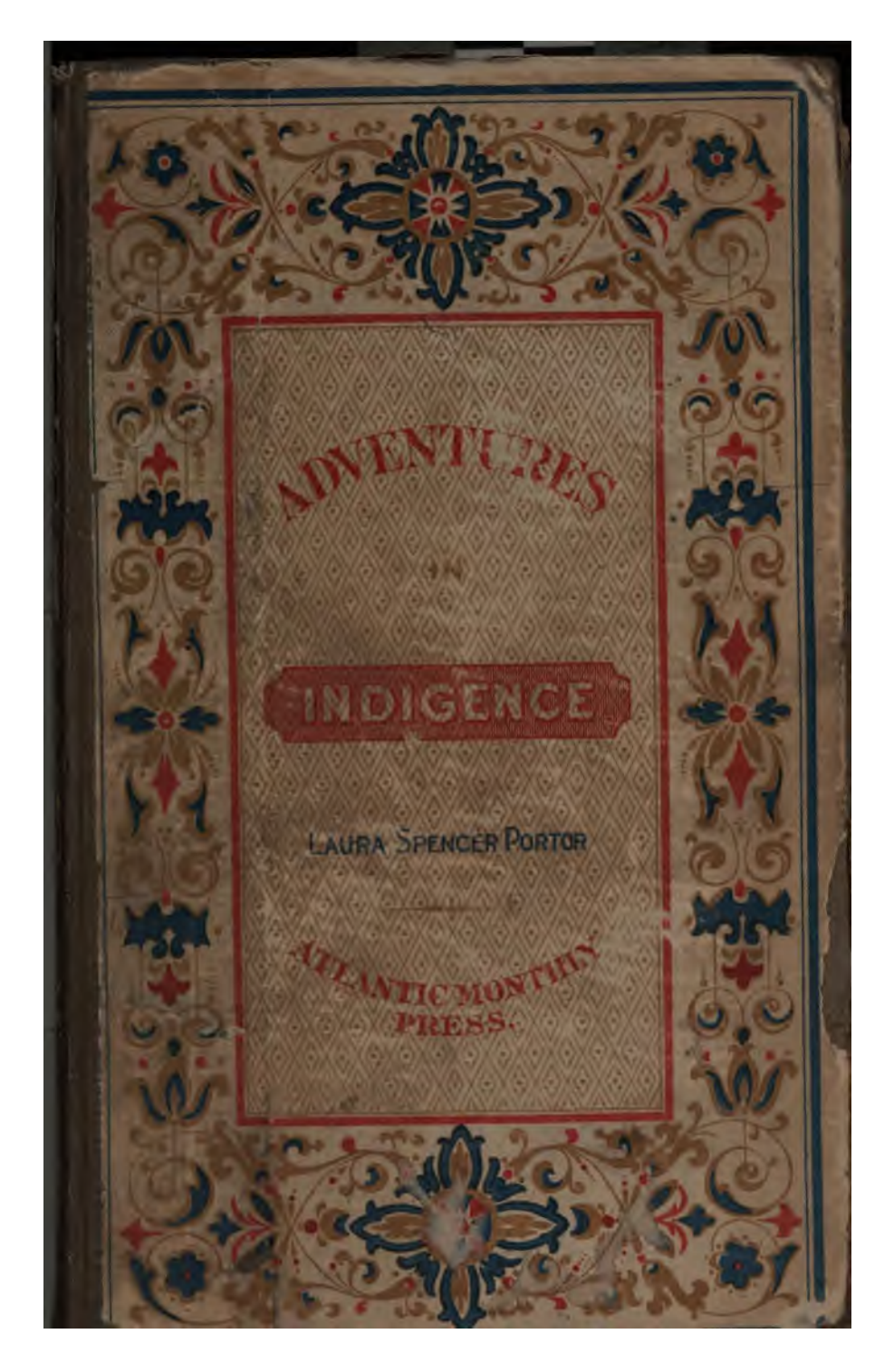
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ADVENTURES

INDIGENCE

LAURA SPENCER PORTOR

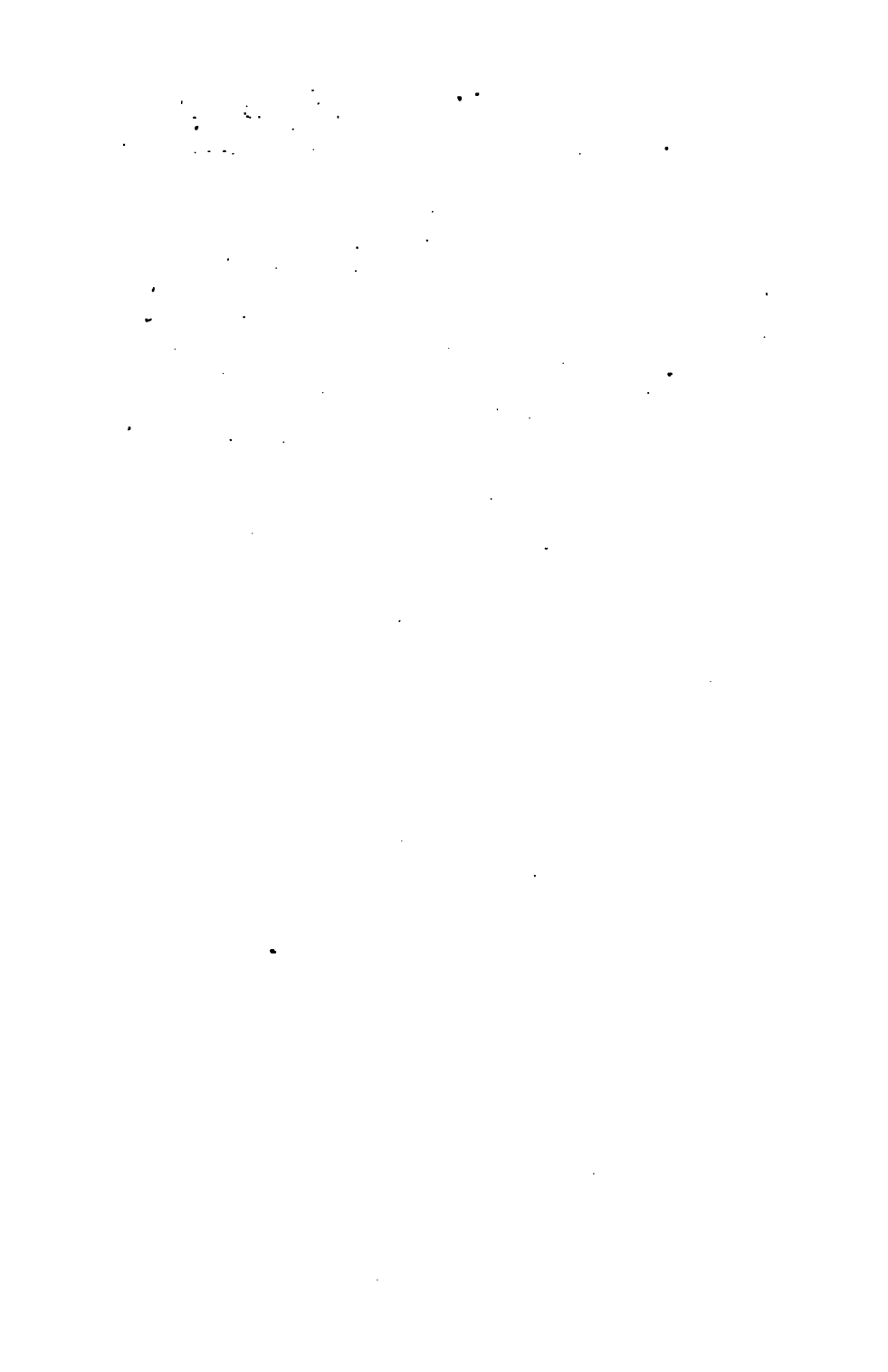
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Adventures in Indigence
and
Other Essays

**ADVENTURES IN
INDIGENCE**

AND

OTHER ESSAYS

BY

LAURA SPENCER PORTOR



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PREFACE

It is doubtful whether the present volume should be looked on as a collection of essays, or might not more aptly be called a book of personal experience. The true essayist offers you fewer doubts and peradventures. He comes with clear philosophies, to which he means to convert you. He is well armed for controversy. He will cite you Scripture, the Decalogue, and the statutes. You will find it difficult to pick a flaw in his argument. Never hope to prove him wrong! He leaves no man reasonable choice but to agree with him. He is a sworn advocate. His essay is his brief. If he be a man of force, his cause is won before the jurymen take their places. Be sure he will prove his point before any just judge. The case, it seems when you come to think upon it later, might almost have gone by default, so little is there any argument left you.

The papers in the present volume are not so forethought, nor are they designed to be so convincing. There is more memory than doctrine in them; more experience than authority,

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theology, or faith. In them will be found little that is taught by the schools, upheld by the courts, or propounded by the Fathers. Perhaps they contain not so much what I believe, as what, because of persistent personal observation and testing and proving, of my own, I have been at last unable to disbelieve. These papers, in short, deal with none of the usual and traditional theories of life, but rather with life as I have intimately found it and lived it.

It is one thing to uphold loyally an ancient faith which has from the beginning been taught one, or to which one has, on the respected authority of others, been converted; it is a wholly other thing to uphold sincerely, and for what it may be worth, a belief which one has but evolved and tested and proven for one's self. God forbid it should be upheld arrogantly! For, as the first method is calculated to produce devout believers, zealous to convert those whose beliefs differ from their own, so does the other tend, rather, to make devout observers; and as the passionate believer is to the last unable to understand how others could believe differently than he does; the devout observer is eager to mark where and how the

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observations of others differ from his own, or, it may be, happily coincide with them. He has a persistent desire to know whether, given the same experience and facts, others will approve of his findings.

It is for this reason, no doubt, that I find myself wondering whether the reader of this volume has discovered, as I have, — all tradition, teaching, theory, and articles of faith to the contrary, — indisputable evidence of the mysterious and imponderable powers of the poor. Has *Life the Educator* revealed herself to another in such a fashion as to me? Have you who read — you also — a secret belief in certain unmistakable superiorities hidden away in the unwritten records and the unadministered laws of lesser creatures than ourselves? Have you, like myself, lost birthdays irretrievably, and found in their place that larger nativity writ in a more universal horoscope?

Though these papers do not claim to be more than personal records of experience and adventure and consequent belief, yet there may be those who will decry the persistent personality, who will condemn the seeming

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egotism. To these there is recommended — perhaps a little wistfully — the paper, toward the last, which attempts to deal with this rather widespread failing.

L. S. P.

ADVENTURES IN INDIGENCE

I

MUSGROVE

BOTH Stevenson and Lamb, writing of "Beggars," fall into what I take to be a grave misapprehension. They both write a defense, and constitute themselves advocates. Lamb brilliantly solicits our pity for these "pensioners on our bounty"; Stevenson, though he characteristically makes himself comrade and brother of his client, and presents the "humbuggery" of the accused as a legitimate art, nevertheless thinks himself but too evidently of a higher order, and the better gentleman of the two. Here, and it would seem in spite of himself, are patronage and condescension.

I own that such an attitude shocks me and makes me apprehensive. Were I superstitious, of a certain creed, I should cross myself to ward off calamity; or were I a Greek of the ancient times, I should certainly pour a propitiatory libation to Hermes, god of wayfarers, thieves, vagabonds, mendicants, and the like.

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"Poor wretches," indeed! "Pensioners," they! "Ragamuffins! humbugs!" They, with their occult powers! *They*, mind you, needing our advocacy! I could indeed bear a different testimony.

I think I began first to know the power of the poor, and to fall under their sway, when I was certainly not more than six years old. It must have been about then that I was learning to sew. This seems to have been a profession to which I was so temperamentally disinclined that my mother, to sweeten the task, was wont during the performance of it to read to me. While I sat on a hassock at her feet scooping an unwilling perpendicular needle in and out of difficult hems, my mother would read from one of many little chap-books and children's tracts, which were kept commonly in a flat wicker darning-basket in her wardrobe; little paper books held over from her own and her mother's childhood. They were illustrated with quaint woodcuts, and the covers of them were colored. I was allowed to choose which one was to be read.

One day — "because the time was ripe," I suppose — I selected a little petunia-colored

Musgrove

one, outwardly very pleasing to my fancy. It contained the story and the pictures of a miserable beggar and a haughty and unfeeling little girl. He was in rags, and reclined, from feebleness I fancy, on the pavement; she walked proudly in a full-skirted dress, strapped slippers, and pantalets. She wore a dipping leghorn with streamers. Just over this she carried a most proud parasol; just under it a nose aristocratically, it may even be said unduly, high in the air.

I think I need not dwell on the tale, save to say that it was one of the genus known as "moral." There was only one ending possible to the story: the triumph of humility, the downfall of pride and prosperity; swift and awful retribution falling upon her of the leghorn and pantalets. I believe they allowed her in the last picture a pallet of straw, a ragged petticoat, bare feet, clasped hands, and a prayerful reconciliation with her Maker. The story was rendered distinctly poignant for me by the fact that I possessed a parasol of pink "pinked silk," which was held on Sundays and certain other occasions proudly — it also — over a leghorn with streamers which dipped

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back and front exactly as did the little girl's in the story. But never, never, — once I had made the acquaintance of that story, — was my nose carried haughtily under it, when by chance I sighted one of that race so numerous and so ancient, so well known and so little known to us all. From that day I began to know the power of the poor.

I can remember delectable candies that I did not buy, delicious soft cocoanut sticks that I never tasted, joys that I relinquished, hopes that I deferred, for the questionable but tyrannous comfort of a penny in an alien tin cup, and the inevitable "God bless you, little lady!" which, remembering her of the leghorn and pantalets, I knew to be of necessity more desirable than the delights I forewent.

There was an old blind man there in my home town, whom I remember very keenly. He used to go up and down, he and his dog, in front of the only caravansary the place boasted, — the Hotel Latonia, — tap-tap, tap-tapping. He had the peculiar stiff, hesitating walk of the blind, the strange expectant upward tilt of the face. He wore across his shoulder a strap on which was fastened a little tin cup.

Musgrove

I used to see the drummers and leisurely men of a certain order, their chairs tilted back against the hotel wall, their heels in the chair-rungs, their hats on the back of their heads, their thumbs in their arm-holes, their cigars tilted indifferently to heaven, and they even cracking their jokes and slapping their knees and roaring with laughter, or perhaps yawning, perfectly unaware of the blind man, it seemed, while he passed by slowly, tap-tap, tap-tapping.

But it was never thus with me. His cane tapped, not only on the pavement, but directly on my heart. You could have heard it, had you put your ear there. It may have seemed that his eyes were turned to the sky. That was but a kind of physical delusion. I knew better. In some occult way they were searching me out and finding me. I can give you no idea of the command of the thing. Perhaps I have no need to. Your own childhood — it is not improbable — may have been under a similar dominion.

If I thought to experiment and withhold my penny, I might escape the blind man for a while: I might elude him, for instance, while

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the other members of the family and the guests in that old home of my childhood were gay and talkative at the supper-table; or afterward, when laughter and song drowned the lesser sounds; or while I stood safe in the loved shelter of my father's arm, listening to conversations I enjoyed, even though I could not understand them; or while, in the more intimate evenings, he took his flute from its case, screwed its wonderful parts together, and, his fingers rising and falling with magic and precision on the joined wood and ivory, played "Mary of Argyll" until I too heard the mavis singing. But later, later, when I lay alone in my bed in the nursery in the moonlight, or, if it were winter, in the waning firelight and the creeping shadows, then, *then* there came up the stairs and through the rooms the sound of the blind man's cane, tap-tap, tap-tapping. He had come for his penny. And the next time I saw him, with a chastened spirit and a sense of escape I gave him two.

But my own childish subserviency to the poor did not give me so great a sense of their power as my mother's relation to them. She, it seems, was perpetually at their service. Let

Musgrove

them but raise a hand indicating their need ever so slightly, and she moved in quick obedience, although it seemed she too must sometimes have wearied of such service. Guests were many and frequent in that old home, as I have elsewhere told; but these came either by announcement or by invitation; the poor, on the contrary, came unasked, unannounced, and exactly when they chose, as by royal prerogative. Indeed, many a time I have seen my mother excuse herself to a guest, to wait sympathetically upon a man or a woman with a basket, — it might be the queen of the gypsies, with vivid, memorable face; or the Wandering Jew in the very flesh; or it might be Kathleen ni Houlihan herself, all Erin looking out, haunting you, from her tragic old eyes, — offering soap or laces at exorbitant prices, or other less useful wares, tendered for sale and excuse at the kitchen door.

There was one whom I especially remember — Musgrove. He was a fine marquis of a man, was Musgrove, as slender as a fiddle and with as neat a waist. He used to come to the front door and sit by the old hall clock, waiting my mother's pleasure. He had a wife and seven or

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nine children, and a marvelous multiplicity of woes. There was a generosity and spaciousness about the calamities of Musgrove — something mythopœic, promethean. Tragedies befell him with consistent abundance. Four or five of the seven or nine had broken their arms, almost put out their eyes, or had just escaped by a hair's breadth from permanent blanket-mortgage disability when the floor of the cottage they lived in fell through; or they had been all but carried off wholesale by measles. Once all nine, as I remember it, were poisoned *en gros* by Sunday-school-picnic ice-cream, which left the children of others untouched. Only myths were comparable. Niobe alone, and she not altogether successfully, could have matched calamities with him.

By and by Time itself, I think, wearied of Musgrove. I think my mother, sympathetic as she was, must have come to think the arrows of outrageous fortune were falling far too thick for likelihood, even on so shining a mark as Musgrove. She came from interviews with him with a kind of gentle weariness. But Musgrove, I am very sure, had an eye for the drama. He knew his exits and his entrances,

Musgrove

and I have reason to believe no shade of feeling in my mother's face was lost upon him.

He came one day to say good-bye, his shabbiness heightened, but brightened also, by a red cravat. It was safe now, no doubt, to allow himself this gayety. He knew that my mother would be glad to hear that, through the kindness of someone nearly as kind as herself, he had been able to obtain a position in a large city. He lacked but the money to move. After that — prosperity would be his.

My mother did not deny him his chance, Musgrove himself, you see, having contrived it so that the chance was not without a certain advantage and privilege for her. So he made his fine bow, and he and his fine marquis manners were gone.

I think my mother must have missed him. I know I did. The other pensioners came as regularly as ever — the gypsy with her grimy laces; the Jew with his tins and soap; rheumatic darkies by the dozen, frankly empty-handed; the little girl with the thin legs and with the black shawl pinned over her head and draped down over the shy and empty basket on her arm; and the old German inventor

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who always brought the tragedy of old and outworn hopes along with some new invention; or, at infrequent intervals, for a touch of color, there came an Italian organ-grinder, and — if the gods were good — a monkey. But there were times when I would have exchanged them all to see Musgrove again, with his fine promethean show of endurance, his incomparable assortment of unthinkable calamities.

Another, it is true, came in his place, but he was of a wholly different type. He had not the old free manner of Musgrove, yet he was strangely appealing, too. He wore a beard and was stooped and spent and submissive, a man broken by fate. He did not complain. He did not wait rather grandly by the hall clock as Musgrove had done; no, but in the kitchen, about breakfast-time, biding the cook's not always cordial pleasure.

In spite of my mother's sympathy, — which should certainly have made amends for any lack of it in the cook, — he had a way of slipping in and out with a little shrinking movement of his body, like the hound that does the same to escape a blow. One would have said that body and soul flinched. He limped stiffly,

Musgrove

and seemed always to have come a little dazed from far countries.

My mother took even a very keen interest in him. This man was more difficult to reach, but by that very token seemed no doubt the more worthy. He told no wonderful tales to tax your credulity. His very reticence was moving and hard to endure; the death of nine or seven children would have been less sad. He kept coming for quite a long time. Then the day dawned — a day quite like any other, I suppose, though it should have been dark with cloudy portent — when, by some slight misstep, some trifling but old reference on his part when his mind was off its guard, my mother discovered, as by a sudden lightning flash, that this *was* Musgrove.

I have known some dramatic moments in my life, but I would not put this low on the list.

He seemed to know for an intense arrested instant that he had spoken a false line, that he had for a miserable moment forgotten his part. He staggered into it again with what I know now was fine courage, and managed in perfect character to get away. I can still see him as he departed, bent and submissive (having most

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meekly thanked my mother), and not forgetting to limp stiffly, going along under the falling leaves of the grape-arbor, in the autumn sunshine, the shadows of the stripped vines making a strange and moving pattern on his old coat as he went; nor have I failed to see him in all the years since, thus departing, — inevitably, irretrievably, — and have found my heart going many a time along with him.

My mother, and I with my hand in hers, went back into the quiet comfortable rooms of that old house. But if you suppose we went in any spirit of ascendancy, or righteous indignation, or justification, you are indeed mistaken. To be in the right is such an easy, such a pleasant thing; what is difficult and must be tragically difficult to endure is to be artistically, tragically in the wrong. I think it likely that my mother remembered Musgrove, as I have done, through all the years, a little as a survivor might remember one who had gone down before his eyes. It is thus, you see, that Musgrove, bent and always departing, still continues to sway others with his strange powers, as it is fitting, no doubt, that one of his rare genius should do.

II

THE HARP AND THE VIOLIN

BESIDES those that I have mentioned, there were two especially of that ancient race whose fortunes were bound in with my early memories.

It was upon a day when I was a little more than fourteen that I came to know them. I was alone at home, save for the maids in the house, and was reading at my ease, as I loved to do, in that old verandah that fronted the south. I remember well that the book I read was "Rasselas, or The Happy Valley."

The verandah was deep and long. Beside it ran a brick pavement, delightful in color and texture. Over this, joining the verandah, there curved a latticed grape-arbor of most gracious lines, on which grew, in lovely profusion, a wistaria, a catawba grape-vine, moon-flower, and traveler's-joy. When the wistaria, like a spendthrift, had lavished all its purple blossoms, and there were left but green leaves in its treasury, then the grape bloom lifted its fragrance; and when this was spent, the traveler's-joy, as though it had foreseen and saved

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for the event, flung forth its abundance; and when at last its every petal had fallen and nothing more remained, — for the moonflower had its own prejudice, persistently refused the demands of the sun, and would open its riches only to the moon and the night moths, — then the early autumn sun, feeling through the thinning leaves, hardly expectant, would come upon that best treasure of all, stored long, against this time, in the reddening clusters of the grapes.

All these things lent I cannot say what charm inexhaustible to that old verandah, and made it a place of abiding romance and delight. The pattern of the sunshine and of the moonlight on the floor of it, as they fell through the lattice and the leaves, are things that still haunt my memory with the sense of a lovely security, of a generous abundance, and, as it were, of the lavish inexhaustible liberality of life itself.

There, secure against interruption, I read and pondered, with the imaginative ponderings of fourteen, the strange longings of that Prince who should have been so content in the Happy Valley.

As I read, I was aware of a strange intru-

The Harp and the Violin

sion: a bent form in baggy trousers and rusty coat stooped under the weight of an old and worn harp; behind him, bent also, but by no visible burden, an old man with a violin entered the gateway of the arbor. They came very slowly and deliberately, yet without pause or uncertainty. They did not introduce themselves, being, I knew instantly, quite above such plebeian need. They asked no permission, nor solicited any tolerance. They spoke not a word. It was as if they had long outgrown the need of such earthly trivialities.

He of the rusty coat and baggy trousers, having taken a slow look at the place around, — as though to establish in his mind some mysterious identity, — let the harp slip from his shoulders to the brick pavement, adjusted it there very deliberately, and proceeded to pluck one or two of its strings with testing fingers, still looking around carefully all the while; then he adjusted his camp-stool, seated himself, pulled the worn, yet delicate and feminine instrument toward him, so that her body lay against his shoulder, and put his hands in position to play.

The old violin, more lordly, made no con-

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cession whatever to harmony; he tuned or touched not a string, but with a really kingly gesture put his instrument in the worn hollow of his shoulder, laid his head and cheek over against it, as though lending his whole soul to listen, raised the bow, held it for an immortal instant over the strings, and then drew out a long preliminary note — on, on, on, to the very quivering tip of the bow.

My education had not been neglected as to music. There had always been much of it in my home, where flute and voice and harp and violin and piano spoke often, and my home town was near a great musical centre, where, young as I was, I had heard the best that was to be heard. Had I been in a critical mood, I should have noted how badly the long-drawn note was drawn; I can hear still how excruciating it was, how horribly it squawked; but rendered solemn, as I was, by the strangeness of their appearance and their presence, and dimly, dimly aware of their immortal powers, it thrilled me more than I remember those of Sarasate or Ysaye to have done.

The long note at an end, without so much as a consultation of the eyes, they then began.

The Harp and the Violin

With never a word, only with thrilling tones horribly off the key, the violin spoke, say rather wrung its hands and wailed,—“Oh, don’t you remember” — (“Oh, yes; I remember!” throbbed and sobbed the harp) — “Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?”

They played it all through, even to what must have been the “slab of granite so gray,” varying all the while from one half to one tone off the key, the old violin lending his ear as attentively all the while to the voice of his instrument as if she spoke with the tongues of angels; his dim veiled eyes fixed on incalculable distances, like those of an eagle in captivity.

The old harp, on the contrary, kept his eyes lowered stubbornly on the vibrating strings; and the harp, as he smote, quivered like some human thing struck upon its remembering heart. From the painfully reminiscent song they leaped without pause into that second most wailful melody in the world, —

Ah, I have sighed to rest me,
Deep in the quiet grave, —

and played that on to the end also.

But though to the outward eye these visitors

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played upon the harp and violin, how much more indeed did they play upon me! Young, and sensitive, and as yet unsounded, how, with dim compelling fingers they searched and found and struck and drew from me emotions I had never known! Old and worn and bowed with life, and weather-beaten of the world, they played there in the mottled sunlight of that romantic arbor, as might Ulysses have stood mistaken and unhonored by those who had but heard of Troy. There was to me something suddenly overwhelming in the situation. Oh, who was I, to enjoy so much, in such security; to feast upon plenty, and to know the generous liberality of life, while these, doomed to the duress of the gods, went through the world, day after day, half-starved, playing miserable memorable music fearfully off the key!

Perhaps I was intense; certainly I was young; and as certainly I had all the eager vivid imagination of youth. Moreover, this was, it should not be overlooked, my very first adventure, all my own, with the poor; my first piece of entirely independent service to those mysterious powers. Meanwhile, the divinities

The Harp and the Violin

in disguise played on — a wild, boisterous tune it was now, set to a rollicking measure and infinitely more sad for that than the sighs of "Trovatore," or than sweet Alice under the stone. Bent they seemed on sounding every stop. You may think they were but a grimy pair, dull and squalid; probably embittered. I can only tell you that they invoked for me that day, as with the mournful powers of the Sibyl of Cumæ, love and life and death, and joy irrevocable, and memory — these they called up to pass before me, and bade them as they went, for one summoning moment, to reveal their faces to me.

Presently, I do not know with what dark thoughts, these two would have departed, but I remembered and begged them to stay. I flew upstairs and found my purse, and emptied it, and gave them what it held. They took it without thanks, merely as lawful tribute exacted. Again they would have departed, but I begged them still to remain. Should this ancient Zeus and Hermes be allowed to depart without bread? I disappeared into the house with a beating heart. I found bread and milk and meat. I brought these and set them out

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for them, and drew chairs for them. All this, too, they took for granted, with some shrewd glances at me; they shuffled their feet about under the table, bent low to their plates like hungry men, and shoveled their food into their mouths dexterously with their knives, the better, no doubt, to disguise their divinity.

While they ate, I went, with a heart troubled yet high, and gathered for them grapes that hung immortally lovely in the sun. These too they ate, with a more manifest pleasure, cleaning the bunches down to the stems; and when they had made away with all they could, slipped the remaining clusters in their pockets against a less hospitable occasion.

I remember that then they went and left me standing there in a world of dreams and speculation and adventure. They had gone as they had come but me they left forever changed. As they departed, certain doors in my young days swung and closed mysteriously. For me the channels of life were permanently deepened. With them had departed my complacent, inexperienced attitude of mind; with them had fared forth the care-free child that I had been. This adventure all my own, con-

The Harp and the Violin

ducted in my own manner, had initiated me into vast possibilities, the more impressive because but dimly seen. On me had depended for a little while these two of God knows what ancient descent. I too had begun to know and taste life. I too would begin to count my memories. Oh, strange new world! And with strange people in it!

On this world, enter, upper left stage, Leila the maid.

"Oh, Miss Laura, honey, what you bin' doin'? Dey ain't nothin' but no-'count beggars, chile. Don't you know dey mought 'a' come indo's and carried off all de silver? Dat's just de kind would steal fum you when you warn't lookin'. I ain't right sho' now dey ain't got some o' de silver in dey pockets!" And she took savage stock of what lay on the table.

O Leila, ingenuous mind! Dearly as I loved her, how little she knew! How far she was from understanding the habits and predilections of the gods! Would they trouble, do you think, to take a silver knife or fork, who can take away the priceless riches of childhood with them? Would they pause to purloin a mere petty silver spoon, who can carry off an entire

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golden period of your existence, and leave you with the leaden questions and dull philosophy and heavy responsibility of older years?

I should have asked their names, that I might set these in my prayers, but I had not had presence of mind enough to do that; so, that night, while I knelt by my bed, alone in the moonlight, a very devout little girl, there stood there, shadowy in the shadows, and among my nearest and dearest, on whom I asked the Lord's blessing, the old harp and violin; while, with my head buried passionately in my hands, I begged Providence to have an especial care of these new friends of my heart, to bless them, to let its face shine upon them, and to give them peace.

Musical beggars! I have seen them often since, in one guise or another. Sometimes they trumpet on the trombone or cornet, or blow fearful blasts upon the French horn; I have known them to finesse upon the flute or flageolet. These differences are but inconsiderable. Always I find them equally mighty. I have thought sometimes to get past them with giving them only a great deal more than I could afford. Useless frugality! futile econ-

The Harp and the Violin

omy! For still they will be laying ghostly hands upon you; still will they be exacting a heavier tribute and demanding that gold and silver of the soul which, as Plato is so well aware, is how infinitely more precious.

Though to outward appearance they are busy with their instruments, how they lay ghostly hands upon your imagination. How they conjure up before the inward eye themselves as they might have been, to levy a new tax upon you. The man with the horn, he who plays always off the key, and always a little ahead of the others, he, it is now mysteriously revealed to you, had meant perhaps, at the very least, to play in an orchestra. And the baggy battered old violin was to have wiped his heated brow with a grand gesture, and bowed condescendingly over his collar to metropolitan audiences, had not his dreams so unaccountably miscarried. And the old threadbare harp-player, his shabbiness and his bitter face to the contrary notwithstanding, had meant, had really meant, to pluck some sweetness out of life. And the harp itself (yes, even so extensive is the occult power they wield) makes its own special appeal to you,

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and with its taste for delicacy seems suddenly like a dull tormented thing, swaying and trembling under the stiff sullen fingers of its master, there on the garish pavement — an instrument which, but for the uncertainty of life (ah, the uncertainty of life!), might have responded how devotedly, in the tempered light of a curtained alcove, to the touch of delicate fingers.

All this they conjure up before the mind's eye, ere they stop their excruciating playing. Then the violin, at the very moment that should have been his gracious one, counts the miserably few pennies. The sullen horn, his instrument tucked under his arm, goes on, still a stave ahead of the rest, a sodden expression in his eyes. The old harpist swings the harp rudely over his shoulder, and gives the strap an extra twitch to ease the dull weight, and they are off to fresh pavements and districts new. I have seen great tragedians. I have sat through the sleep-walking scene in "Macbeth." I have heard Banquo knock. I have seen Juliet waken too late in the Capulet tomb and call for Romeo: "O comfortable friar! Where is my lord?" In my schoolgirl

Major LobleY

days I saw Booth in his great parts; but none of these master-scenes and fine harmonies have stirred in me so intolerable an emotion of pity or sense of fatality as an old horn, or harp and violin, grouped on a garish pavement, their lives dedicated to cheap music fearfully off the key.

These are people of power, let appearances be what they may. You may patronize them if you like, and look upon them as the down-trodden and the dregs of existence. I am, indeed, not so hardy. I have read a different fate in their groups and constellations.

III

MAJOR LOBLEY

THERE were other poor whose influence was potent in my childhood, but I pass them by, to note but one more, of a curiously strong type, who crossed my path when I might have been about sixteen. She was a Salvation Army major, — Major LobleY, — and she had at her heels an army of poor wretches, “flood-sufferers.” That great river on which my home town was situated had risen and

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overtrod its banks, spreading devastation. As it happened, my mother had standing idle at that time three or four small houses. Into these a large and variegated band of "flood-sufferers" was assisted to move. They came, poor things, bringing their lares and penates. One, whom I take to have been an aristocrat among them, led a mule. Among them all, like a burst of sunshine over a dark and variegated landscape, came Major Lobley and the drum. It would make a better recital, I know, if I said that she was beating it — but I am resolved to tell of things only as I remember them. The drum, however, even though silent, was to the eye sufficiently triumphant and sounding.

My acquaintance with Major Lobley began the morning after her installation. We had already, for the comfort of her clan, parted with all the available covers we could spare. She came seeking more. The maid brought me her name. I went into the parlor to receive her and to learn her errand. I take the liberty of reminding you that I was young and proud, with a traditional training and conventional pride.

In that curtained and rather sombre room,

Major Loble

there sat Major Loble, like a brilliant bit of sunshine. Before I knew what she was about, she was on her feet, had hold of both my hands, had kissed me on both cheeks, was holding me away from her a little, — a quick pleased gesture seen oftener on the stage than off it, — and was saying dazlingly, "Sister! Are you saved?"

They tell me that even the bravest at the Yser were demoralized by the first use of poisonous gases and other methods of warfare unknown, even undreamed of, by them; and a like panic is said to have seized the Germans at earliest sight of the British armored monsters which ploughed over the ground disdainful of every obstacle, taking their own tracks with them.

Major Loble attacked me in a fashion I had never before even dreamed of. She was carrying her own tracks with her. None of my own aforethought invulnerable defenses were of the least use. She had thrown down and traversed the most ancient barriers. She had attacked me in the very intrenchments of my oldest traditions. Where were dignity, convention, pride of place, custom of behavior,

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and other supposedly impregnable defenses? Where were distinctions of class, fortifications of good taste, intrenchments of haughtiness? Where were reserve and other iron and concrete and barbed-wire entanglements? I tell you, they were as though they were not! This glib inquiry about my soul routed me, demoralized me so completely, that I do not even remember what I said. I only know that I fled precipitately for safety into the covert of the nearest subject. Was there anything she needed? And how could I serve her?

At this she was eager.

"Well, I'll tell you! We need another comfort. Darius needs a comfort for his mule. Darius is a good man and his soul is saved. Now could n't you lend another comfort to the Lord?"

"Yes," said I, in what now seems to me a kind of hypnotized state. "I think I can find another for you." And I went myself and took it from my bed.

She received it with hallelujahs and went away beaming, assuring me as she went, and as on the authority of an ambassador, that I would certainly have my reward.

Major Lobley

I make no apology for all this. I know well that I was the weak and routed one. I know that this gypsy from nowhere, with her lack of advantages and her Cinderella training among the ashes and dregs of life, had me at an astonishing disadvantage. I know that, while I stood by, in my futile pride, she went off unaccountably, in a spangled coach, as it were, carrying with her salvation and all the satisfaction in the world, and happily possessed of the bed-covers without which I was to sleep somewhat chilly that night.

But I think it due to myself to say that this weakness on my part was not single. For weeks, months, — as long as she stayed in the neighborhood, — Major Lobley swayed people as by a spell. One would have sworn her drumstick was a wand. In theory, and out of her presence, we younger ones declared her presuming and impossible, but were reduced to serve her whenever she appeared. My mother and my elder sister, who were experienced and better judges, continued to give her and her thin ragged ranks daily help. Pans of biscuit, pots of soup, drifted in that northwesterly direction as by some gulf stream of sympathy

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which you might speculate and argue about all you liked, but whose course remained mystical and unchanged.

One point I must not fail to mention. I had worried somewhat concerning Darius's mule. There was, I knew, no shelter for him save a tiny woodshed just about half his size. I pictured him standing there, with only his forequarters or hindquarters sheltered, and the rest of him the sport of the elements and the biting weather. Needless anxiety; futile concern! I might have read a different fate for him in Orion and Pleiades! Such anxiety comes of thinking too meanly of life. Darius had a better opinion of it, and it may be with better cause. Perhaps he argued that a power that was able to save his soul was perfectly well able to look after his mule; and rendered expectant by this belief, Darius's eyes saw what my less faithful ones would certainly have overlooked, namely, that the comfortable kitchen of the little house, with its sunshine and its neat wainscoting, made an ideal abiding-place for his friend. Here, therefore, positively benefiting by misfortune and like an animal in a fairy tale, the mule of Darius abode,

Major Lobley

and, no doubt, more comfortably than ever in his life before; and even if his meals continued to be meagre, he was enabled to eke them out with a generous attention to the wainscoting.

You see! What can be said of a people like that, able to turn the most unlikely things to strange and immediate uses, for all the world as the fairy godmother did the pumpkin and the mice!

What stands out most clearly, as I remember Major Lobley, is neither her scoop-bonnet, nor the drum, nor her solicitude for my soul, but rather the way she managed, say rather contrived, to have us to do whatever she wanted us to do. This was not accomplished by tact, not by craft, not even by intelligence, certainly, I think, not by pity. It was rather, I am persuaded, something ancient and inherited, and not acquired in Major Lobley's brief span; something, rather, dating back to gypsy centuries, God knows how many æons ago — something that had ruled and triumphed, with sounding and loud timbrel, on countless occasions before now; some freedom, some innate self-approval; some linking, it

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would almost seem, of the powers of poverty with the powers of the Deity.

Have it as you will, the finer appearance still clings to the improvident. They give you color and incident without your asking; they scatter romance and wonder with largesse, as kings. As mere memorable characters, were not the old blind man and Musgrove and Major Lobley worth the money and the anxiety they cost us? And who will contend that Darius's tradition is not to be valued above a mere strip of wainscoting and the cost of a few repairs?

I have long believed that Æsop needs re-writing in many instances, and very especially in that of "The Grasshopper and the Ant." What should be told — since Æsop's creatures are intended to exemplify human behaviors and draw human morals — is how the Grasshopper spent the winter with the Ant, and ate up all the Ant's preserves and marmalades, and fiddled nightly and gayly by the Ant's fire, and managed somehow to make the Ant feel that the privilege had been all her own, to have labored long for the benefit of so interesting and so gifted a gentleman.

Major Loble

I can recall from time to time, all through my childhood and girlhood, that I and mine made a kind of festival of a like circumstance, and how gladly we toiled for the benefit of that class which might be said to winter perpetually on our sympathies. I do not allude merely to tableaux, fairs, private theatricals, musicales, and the like, given for the benefit of those who neither sowed nor gathered into barns. I would be afraid to say how many times, from my early years, I was for their sake a spangled fairy, a Queen Elizabeth court dame, an "Elaine," white, pallid, on a barge, dead of unrequited love, a Gainsborough or Romney portrait, or a Huguenot lady parting from her lover, or a demure "Priscilla," or a dejected "Mariana," or a shaken-kneed reciter of verses, or a trembling performer on the piano. I remember that there was a huge trunk in the old attic at home given over to nothing but amateur theatrical properties. I remember coming home often from dragging, wearisome rehearsals, how tired, but happy! What fun it was to toil and practise and rehearse and labor until your little bones ached "for the benefit of — !"

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"For the benefit of"! I tell you it is a magic phrase! I remember my mother coming home again and again, — from some charitable conclave I suppose, — radiant and eager, as she so often was, to announce that we were once more to be permitted to labor in response to its magic. Once, after her attendance on some missionary meeting, it was conveyed to us that we were to be allowed to dress fifty dolls "for the benefit of" as many gregarious little grasshoppers of Senegambia, to the end that their Christmas and our own should be the happier.

It had all the air of a fine adventure. It *was* a fine adventure. I really would not have missed it. Yet unless you have dressed, let us say, thirty dolls, and know that twenty more remain naked, you can hardly guess how doll-dressmaking may hang heavy, even on the most eager fingers. I can still see them all in their pretty and varied dresses, ranged triumphant at last on top of the old square piano, that we might behold the labor of our hands — their feet straight ahead of them, their eyes fixed, staring but noncommittal, supposedly on Senegambia.

Major Loble y

It seems to me now a gay, even though at the same time a somewhat futile, thing to have done; but turn it as you will, the true privilege was ours.

We and our forebears, you see, had in perfect innocence laid by a few stores through the generations. We had preserved and retained certain standards and comfortable customs and conveniences of living; certain traditions, too, of education and treasures of understanding; by which token it became our privilege to entertain and provide for those cicada souls who had followed the more romantic profession of fiddling; and that we might have our privilege to the full, we were graciously permitted to set out preserves, not merely for the swarming grasshoppers of our own land: it was vouchsafed us to sustain and supply with dolls and other delights the appealing little grasshoppers of Senegambia.

Recalling all my childhood and girlhood experience with the poor, I am led by every path of logic to believe that they have some secret power of their own — some divine right and authority by which they rule, beside which the most ancient dynasties are but tricks of

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evanescence, and the infallibility of the Pope a mere political exigency. The powers they wield would seem to me unique. Show me a dictatorship, empire, oligarchy, system, or a suzerainty, seignory or pashawlic, which presides over and possesses anything commensurate with their realm; which sways and commands anything comparable to their wide dominion!

Will you show me any other people outside of the fairy-books who can put the most fearful calamity on like a cloak and doff it at will, who can augment their families to seven or eight children overnight, and reduce them as readily to five or six the following day, if it but seem to them advisable? Where outside their ranks is there any one capable of persuading you that it is a privilege to sleep cold so that some Darius you never saw or care to see shall, he and his allegorical mule, go better warmed? Who else, being neither of your kith nor kin, has such power over you that, with a mere bloodshot eye and shiver of the shoulders, he can turn your automobile, your furs, your warmth, and all your pleasant pleasures into Dead Sea apples of discomfort? Or, did any of

Major Lobley

your own class, by merely playing "Ben Bolt," raggedly and horribly off the key, under a grape-arbor, exercise so great a power over you that, having given him what you had, you went awed and chastened of all vanity, and set his name in your prayers that night as the Church service does the king? Are these people of rank who can do this? Or will you still cling to your aristocracies?

It is likely that I shall be accused of sentimentality. Some will say that to talk of the power of the poor is but cruel irony. If I would speak wisely and not as one of the foolish women, let me live and work among the poor, or better still, be of them. This is the only way fairly to judge them.

I am of a like opinion; and am therefore resolved to ask you to let me speak of a later time when I myself was poor, and of the wider knowledge of the powers of the poor which that circumstance afforded me. For, in my advantageous days, I was permitted only to serve the poor, the discouraged, the improvident; later, I was promoted to be, at least in a measure, of their fellowship.

IV

MAMIE FAFFELFINGER

THE *nouveaux pauvres* are, I believe, as a rule, fully as awkward with their poverty as the *nouveaux riches* with their wealth. They have not the true grand manner. They are not a whit more born to the rags than your suddenly prosperous parvenu to the purple. It is difficult to be at ease with them. Their behaviors, their manners, their speech, more often their silences, are forever reminding you of their former mode of living.

For these and other reasons, I willingly pass over those intervening years, when, though distinctly poor, I was unaccustomed, and wore my changed conditions, I do not doubt, awkwardly. I pass on to a later and more fixed season when, thrown wholly now on my own resources, and totally untrained and unfitted for such an emergency, I made shift to support myself, to live meagrely, and to endure what I took to be a well-nigh intolerable poverty.

Poverty is a variable term and much subject to comparison. Some will allow it only to those who have been born to it. To have been

Mamie Faffelfinger

always half-starved, these think, and to carry a basket from door to door — *that* is to be poor. But it is idle to think of cold and hunger to the point of beggary as the only cold and hunger there are. Not alone are there degrees of cold and hunger of the body, — discomfortable and ill-nourished living, — but there are, as well, things which seem to me even more difficult to endure — unsatisfied hunger of the mind and heart and a most cruel and persistent chill of the spirit. The literal-minded may need to see the open sore, the sightless eye, or the starved countenance, before their pity is moved; but he who has ever touched the spiritual values will know — with a tenderness that is mercy — that in one who never asked for pity, one who perhaps even went outwardly gay, there may be hidden hurts borne unflinchingly; intolerable darknesses not complained of; crippled powers which once went proud and free; and a heart and mind which have endured, it may be, starved hours. These are, I believe, some of the most real poverties that the soul may be called on to endure.

Yet, God forbid that, having tasted some of

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them, I should not bear true witness! There are some hidden springs in these also. Here also, in what you would take to be so dry, so arid a land, there will have been wells and fountains, and locusts and honey for those cut off from their kind. But of these things I would speak later. I wish at present to tell of my further adventures with the poor, when I myself had become more nearly one of them.

Under the conditions I have mentioned my life had of course changed greatly. Most of the old fond bonds were broken; but there were new and even closer ones to be assumed, newer and larger responsibilities to be undertaken.

In every circumstance of our lives lies the stirring knowledge that one's own case, however strange, is far from being singular. There are others besides myself with whom Poverty has taken up its abode; there are others from whose cup Despair has daily drunk; who, looking up from their daily bread, have found Sorrow's eyes forever on them. Those who have known these cup-companions need not be told how the House of Life can be darkened, or how these darker presences occupy the chambers of

Mamie Faffelfinger

the mind. Nor need they yet be reminded how all this becomes bearable, even enduringly precious to the heart, if Love but remains, and consents still to sit at the board, and, though with brows bent, still breaks bread with its white hands, and lifts in its unshaken fingers the cup of bitter wine.

We went to live in the deep country, on what had once been a beautiful old estate. The house had not been lived in for years. It still preserved an air of beauty and dignity, but its ancient pride and fitness were turned toward decay. But if, like myself, it had fallen on adversity and evil fortune, that was but the better reason I should understand and love it. Wholly without what the world calls comforts, yet how comforting it was in those chill and cheerless times! Downfallen in the eyes of others, lowered from its proud estate, how I have yet lifted my heart up to it under the stars, and paid it an homage of love and thankfulness not matched, I think, in all its better days.

Our precarious means being entirely dependent on such writing as I could do, it would have been extravagance and bankruptcy for

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me to assume the domestic duties. There was no one else. I was the only woman of the household. It seemed to me that a working housekeeper might solve the difficulty; one of that variety which lays not so much stress upon wages as upon a home. I found a surprising number with this tendency. In answer to a most modest advertisement, I received sixty-four answers. Those whom, in the course of time, I at last engaged, were in each case women who had seen happier conditions and were by their own affidavits capable of standing anything. But I found them to be, without exception, shrinkingly susceptible to physical discomforts, and of these there were in that old house many.

These women were *nouveaux pauvres* of a middle-class order and had all the crudities of their condition. Each of them carried with her a remnant of her "better days," as an inveterate shopper carries an out-of-date sample, resolved, yet unable, to find its match. One of them could not forget, and had no mind to let you forget, that her husband had made four thousand a year; another had been to school in Paris; and one always wore rubber gloves,

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"because," she assured me, "as long as I can have my hands white, I can stand a great deal." Another insisted on the most fluffy and unsubstantial desserts, and thought the rest of the meal mattered little, so long as the finale had a grand air. Another could not endure the odor of onions and fainted at the sight of liver. Yet another, from reverses and humiliations unendurable, had turned Christian Scientist. I learned afterward that she came hoping to convert me to the idea that there is no poverty. I wish I could have spared her the futility.

By and by I abandoned all hope of a working housekeeper. I knew that what I needed was a "general houseworker."

Those who in extremity have sought servants in city employment bureaus need not be told what is too old a tale. When the array of imposing applicants had all declined the discomforts of my home, and the honor of being employed by me, the manager explained, what I was dull not to have known myself, that it might be wise to try some of the employment bureaus in the poorer quarters. I found one finally at the head of the Bowery, and climbed its rickety stairs.

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They were a strange and varied lot that I came upon now: weird old flat-footed fairies, given to feathers and elaborate head-dresses, or young heavy Audreys who looked at you out of dull eyes. I explained elaborately the conditions under which they would be called on to live. I omitted nothing, not even the screech-owls, or the night sounds that might or might not be wild cats. They came eagerly or sullenly, according to their dispositions. But apparently none of them had at all grasped what I said. For when they saw the place, and felt the loneliness of which I had so thoroughly warned them, they turned and fled. The house might have been haunted.

Finally I heard that one could engage servants of a certain order from the Charities associations, such as the Society for Improving the Condition of the Poor. To one of these I went.

The matron, a full-eyed woman who gave the impression of having to discipline an over-kind heart by an assumption of great severity, questioned me curtly. What surroundings had I to offer? My heart sank, but I went over

Mamie Faffelfinger

faithfully the disadvantages — the extreme loneliness of the life, the necessity that those who entered on it should abandon all hope of "movies." "Movies" there were not within twelve miles. There were no conveniences, no department stores, no bargain sales, nothing — only field and forest, stars and dawns and sunsets — nothing!

She lifted explanatory eyebrows, a little displeased, I thought.

"I mean the *moral* surroundings." Then, at my pause, "I mean, are you yourself a Christian woman?"

This was no Major Loble. It is certain that she cared not a pin whether I was "saved." She merely had it in mind to do her duty by her flock. It was her duty to see that the poor, whose condition was to be improved, were placed in Christian homes.

Being perhaps the better satisfied on this point, for a rather faltering answer on my part, she sent a mild-eyed assistant for "Mamie Faffelfinger."

She meanwhile explained in a businesslike way that Mamie was a Catholic, brought up in an orphan asylum; her child was not a year

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old; "the man" — (so the matron designated him curtly) — was not her husband.

"You mean she would wish a home for the child too?"

The full-eyed woman ceased turning her pencil between her thumb and fingers on the desk and gave me an aggressive look.

"Certainly. Most of these people have n't a crust to live on. If you do not wish to employ that kind, there are the employment bureaus."

So they dawned on me like a blessing. These were not parvenu poor who had been to school in Paris, who would insist on unsubstantial desserts. Here were no head-dressy old fairies of questionable powers; these were no exotic fruits of the "gardens of Proserpine"; here was the good salt brine, here the ancient tides of reality — "the surge and thunder of the Odyssey."

Meanwhile the matron was speaking: —

"The man is not her husband. But if you are a Christian, I am sure you have no narrow scruples as to *that*. He drinks. She is half-starved. I have told her we will get her and the child a place, if she will promise to leave

Mamie Faffelfinger

him." She glanced at the open doorway of her tiny office: "Yes, Mamie, come in."

It was then that I first saw Mamie and Anne.

Mamie looked her part. She was pallid, rather pretty; very slight, with a skin of extreme fineness. She had heavy-lidded eyes, that looked to have seen much weeping, and a smile the more pathetic for its great readiness.

As to Anne, a consistent story would require that she should be as pallid as her mother, that her little hand, intent now on her mother's hat-brim, should be a mere kite's claw; and there should have been delicate dark rings under her eyes. But, far from being a kite's claw, the hand on the hat-brim was as plump as ripe fruit, and her cheeks were like smooth apricots perfect with the sun. But, after all, there is no describing Anne. If you will look at the child held in the arms of the Madonna of the Chair and then at the one in the arms of the Sistine Madonna; then, if you will picture a child not quite a year old, who might worthily be the little sister and companion of these, you will have some idea, even though inadequate still, of what Anne was, as she held tight

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to Mamie's rakish hat-brim and gave me the solemn attention of her eyes.

I went over the requirements. I spoke of the loneliness. Not a town within miles.

"Well, what do you think of that!" Mamie replied. But she was unfeignedly eager to come.

"When could you be ready?"

"Oh, right away," she said. "I've got Anne's clothes here." She glanced at a small paper bundle under one arm.

My good fairy, who pays me occasional visits, prevented my asking her where her own clothes were.

The matron interposed. Mamie could stay right there until I was ready to take her, late that afternoon. Then, when Mamie had gone into the outer room, the matron explained.

"She has n't any home to go to. He left her and raised money on her furniture. They came and took it. She has n't even a stick of it."

Tragic as this was, my mind was for the moment intent on something else.

"But she wears a wedding ring!" I said.

The matron pulled a heavy ledger toward her.

Mamie Faffelfinger

"Oh, yes; they all do. They'd go starved, but they'd buy a wedding ring."

She pressed her lips together, shook her head, and began setting down data, — my name, address, occupation, the names of two of my friends, — they must be people of some standing, who could vouch for me; then more as to Mamie, I suppose, in the interest of system and statistics.

I can give you no idea of the comradeship of that journey with Mamie and Anne. Mamie looked delightedly out of the car-window, noting the most trifling points of interest with enthusiasm, and saying every little while, "Well, what do you think of *that!*" Or she would excitedly point out some speeding bird, or flitting house, or other flying object, to Anne, and Anne would lurch forward to look, her little nose sometimes touching the pane, and then would turn good-naturedly and look at me, with every air of asking me if that probably so-interesting object had managed to escape me also.

When we arrived at the house, Mamie was as cheerful as a sparrow. The room on which flat-footed fairies and dull Audrey's had looked

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with unconcealed contempt or disapproval, she flew to. She settled in it like a bird in her nest, and chirped contentedly to Anne, —

“Oh, Anne, look at the nice bureau! And the washstand! What do you think of *that!*” Then she turned to me, with that winning comradely smile: “I *like* bureaus and washstands — furniture, I mean, and things. It makes you think of home.” And she drew her hand along the bureau.

I did not know then, but I soon found out, that this was the top and bottom of all her longings, and this the real hunger of her heart, — a hunger starved enough, of course, in all her orphan-asylum years, — a craving for a place of her own.

Mamie talked much of “Bill.” He filled her life and days, there could be no doubt. If she swept, it was to his glory. If she scrubbed a floor or kneaded dough, or bent affectionately over the scalloping of a pie-crust, it was certainly for love of him that she lent these her attention. She soon began sending him her weekly earnings. I remonstrated, and suggested that it might be better to save her money against another rainy day. She dusted her

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hands of flour and began scraping the bread-board, vigorously, with the strength of her whole body. I waited for my reply. At last it came.

"Well, I will say you've been good to me, and Anne loves you — but I think you've got a hard heart."

Secretly I agreed with her. I retrenched and urged her to send only a part of her money, saving the rest for furniture. Of course, I knew by this time that the word "furniture" was to her like magic and a charm.

Meanwhile, fond as she was of Anne and proud of her, Mamie was bent on not spoiling her. She used to put her in a wooden tub in the sunshine on the floor of the kitchen, as Peter Pumpkin-Eater put his wife in the pumpkin shell; and like Peter, there she kept her very well. And Anne, more ingenuous and happier than Diogenes, — for she liked it and crowed if people came into her sunshine, — would stay there perfectly happy and delighted for the greater part of the day, playing with an apple or a potato. I really never saw such a baby.

Meanwhile, although Bill was, it seems, drinking more than ever, with the aid, of

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course, of Mamie's earnings, Mamie herself contrived to be above fact and experience, and was sure he was actively reforming. In a sense she really lived a charmed life.

It seemed that Fate and fact could deal her no blow which would finally affect her. She knew Bill's failings better than the matron, by a great deal; but if you suppose that these could spoil the pure romance of life for her, or invalidate her dream of a home and furniture of her own, cushioned chairs owned and sat upon by the reformed Bill and herself, you are much mistaken.

She was a firm believer in miracles. "I know you don't believe in them," she would say; "but at the Orphan Asylum there was a statue of Saint Stephen that used to turn around over night, it really did, if it was pleased with what you did."

Like so many of her class, Mamie had an incorrigible tendency toward rumor. Knowledge comes not to these by laborious delving of their own, but appears to be delivered to them out of the air as by bird auguries, and by all manner of unauthenticated hearsay infinitely rather to be trusted than fact. I take

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this to be in their case a survival of what was believed, in ancient times, to be speech with Divinity. However it may shock the modern mind to read of the Almighty giving out to Moses, not merely the majestic laws graven on tables of stone, but commands and detail and measurement of great exactness as to the stuff and manner of fashioning and trimming the High Priest's breeches, to the minds of Mamie and her class there would be in this little that was shocking, they themselves believing and delighting in Divine collaboration in even the most homely matters.

Anne wore on a string about her neck a little square of Canton flannel which in the course of many months had become extremely grimy. I suggested as tactfully as I could that this was not in keeping with the laws of health, and might be, with a view to germs, a positive danger to Anne.

Mamie smiled happily, indulgently.

"That's just where you're wrong! It's to *protect* her from danger — specially danger by drowning!"

Once I suggested that, if I were she, I would not feed Anne burned bread-crusts.

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"Oh, but they say they're good for a baby; they say they're splendid for the digestion."

Useless to argue. She had always heard so. "They" said so.

So it is that knowledge comes to them, not laboriously, as does our own, but by easy rumor, floating hearsay; and wisdom is brought to them without effort of their own, as viands to a king. They are fed by ravens. Their gourd grows overnight. Messengers still come and go between heaven and earth to instruct them. There is not required of them, the laboring class, that slavish mental toil exacted of the world's great intellects. Angels and ministers of grace, however they may have abandoned the wise, do still, it seems, defend them. They have only to be of a listening mind and a believing heart, and they shall know what is good for digestion, and what will save their children from drowning.

Mamie, further, was able to maintain a remarkable equilibrium between respectful service as a servant and what might have been the gracious democracy of a ruler. She taught Anne to call me "Honey," and had it as a surprise for me one morning. I will not deny that

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it was a surprise. But if you think that so sweet an appellation in Anne's bird-like voice, her golden head leaning over into the sunshine as she heard my step, seemed to me to be lacking in dignity, then you and I are of contrary opinions.

One day, when Mamie was dusting where hung a Fra Lippo Madonna, Anne pointed a fat finger at it, demanding, "Honey?"

Mamie did not even pause.

"No," she said briskly, "that's not Honey. That's Lord and Lord's mawma."

V

THE LURE OF THE "CHIFFONEER"

ONE day, Mamie came to me, her face beaming.

"I want to do the right thing, so I'm going to give you a whole month's notice. Bill has rented some rooms. What do you think of that!"

I told her gently, but firmly, what I suspected concerning it.

She brought out his letter for proof.

"He's to pay for the rooms, and I'm to send

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him the money for the furniture. He'll get whatever kind I like. You've always been kind to me," she added, "but I think you've got a hard heart as to Bill."

Well, perhaps I had.

The month passed very happily. As his letters came, she would tell me what he had bought.

"It's a bureau with a marble top, — second-hand, Second Avenue, — but as good as new. Besides, some people would rather have antiques. And I *do* like bureaus!"

Then it would be a table that set her singing her queer ragtime songs. Once there came word of three cushioned chairs. One letter announced a looking-glass. And once, as I went into the kitchen suddenly, there was Mamie, one arm above her head, the other holding her skirt, dancing for Anne to see, and to Anne's inexpressible wonder and delight. She sat there in her tub, leaning forward, beaming, fascinated, and holding tight to its sides as though we might all be personages in a fairy-tale, and she and the tub might any moment fly away.

At sight of me, Mamie stopped, flushing

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pink as a rose, apologetic, but unfeignedly happy.

"I could n't help it! He's bought me a *chiffoneer!*"

A moment later, as I passed through the hall, I could hear Mamie singing, "And she's going back to her Daddy, and her home, home, *home!*" — to some impromptu rigmarole tune of her own.

Soon after this she took the train to the nearest town and came back laden with packages — all manner of cheap household stuff picked up at the five-and-ten-cent store. It occurred to me that she might as well have a small empty trunk of mine that there was in the attic. She was delighted with the gift, and wore the key of it on a chain around her neck.

"I'd rather have that key than a locket!" she said, putting her hand over it affectionately. It was so that she repaid you tenfold. "It's wonderful," she would say, every little while, in joyful anticipation, "having your own home!"

For myself, despite many unmitigated realities, I could not help feeling that I was living

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in something of a wonder story. Who knew but that, with those extraordinary powers of hers, which so readily rose above fact, who knew but that she might rub that key some day as Aladdin his lamp, and turn us all into triumphant heroes and heroines.

Mamie did not forget, as I said good-bye to her in the big city terminal where I finally left them, to give me parting advice, sisterly sympathy:—

“Now, don’t you go and get discouraged. I know you’ve had troubles. Well, I’ve had trouble enough, too. You just keep right on, and hold your head high. There’s no telling what’ll come to them that holds their heads high. Look at me!”

I looked at her and could have felt convinced. Then we said our good-byes, and away they went. The last I saw of them in the crowd was Anne’s hand still waving loyally to me over Mamie’s shoulder quite a long time after her eyes had lost me.

I missed them exceedingly; and the blue-birds of that second spring hardly made up to me for the absence of Anne’s birdlike voice. The new maid, Margaret, was interesting

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enough, but no one could ever quite take the place of those others.

With all this in mind, you will realize with what a sinking of the heart I found that there was more than Mamie to be missed. There could be no doubt in the matter, for there had been no outsider in the house at all of late; therefore it could be due to no other magic than hers that there was a grievous lessening of my scant stores of household belongings — sheets and pillow-cases, towels and a pair of blankets, napkins and, I think, a table-cloth, and some muffin-rings and kitchen conveniences, and I do not know what else.

Little bits of reality came drifting back to me — the key kept so faithfully always around her neck; my own gift of the trunk; and the sentiment — say now, if you like, the sentimentality — with which I had noted the fact that even that rather small trunk was too large for her poor belongings.

Then suddenly, the whole episode read to me like an Uncle Remus "Br'er Fox and Br'er Rabbit" tale, and I was not too discouraged to laugh — as the "Little Boy" is recorded always to have done — at the turn of the story,

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at the inevitable triumph of the cleverer of the two.

Yet for Mamie's sake, not to speak of my own, such an ending was not to be permitted. I had asked her to come to see me in town on one of the days of the week that I was always there, and to be sure to bring Anne to see me. She had assured me that she would, and that she would never forget me. Now I knew it would be necessary, rather, for me to go and find her. I rehearsed the scene mentally. I meant to tell her that she could keep all the things she had stolen. (Let them remain in the manner of coals of fire in her trunk!) I would first reduce her to powder in a solemn and serious manner, and then strew her upon the winds of my righteous indignation! *She* whom I had treated with unfailing kindness! *She* whom in sickness I had nursed! *She* whose many faults had been forgiven her, and in whom I had placed trust! *She!* —

Strangely enough, she did come to see me, that very next day I was in town. She seemed eager to get to me; nervous, too, like one whipped of her conscience. I felt my heart suddenly softening, and as quickly hardened

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it. I really had not expected quick penitence of her, but even so, she must take the full punishment of my disapproval. There is a duty we owe in such matters. I would make nothing easy for her.

She sat down heavily, then suddenly put her hand over quickly on mine. I made no sign. Not even that should move me. Then in a hoarse whisper, a really hoarse whisper, almost a moan, she said, —

“Oh, how shall I tell you? *How* shall I tell you?”

Stony pause. I looked coldly at her. It seemed, for a moment, that the irresistible force really *had* met the immovable body. Then all at once, she put her head down on her arm, sobbed, and spoke.

“There *was n't* any bureau! There *was n't* any chiffoneer! There was *n't even* any rooms!”

An instant of time swirled past. Then I knew, as of old, that the power of the poor is an irresistible force, never — never — not even by the immovable body of our strongest determinations, to be withstood. My own iron resolves I saw converted suddenly into the flimsiest fiction — rent gossamer floating wide.

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Oh! Oh! I could have put my face in my hands and wept. All her dreams gone! All her hopes! her pride! her cherished plans! her money! her faith — everything! How small the theft of a few pillow-cases and towels looked now that, at Fate's hands, she, poor thing, had had all this stolen from her! This was no time to reduce her to powder, when she was already reduced to floods of tears and I by no means far from the verge of them.

The story is too obvious to tell. Mamie's miracle had failed. The unreformable Bill had not reformed. But neither, — I hasten to add, — neither, it seems, was Mamie's ineradicable desire for a home eradicated. I have mentioned before my belief that Fate cannot finally affect the people of this extraordinary class. I believe them all to have been plunged more effectually than Achilles in some protective flood.

Mamie, with the help of the perpetually severe, perpetually tender-hearted matron, went out to work again. But there may be those who would be more interested to know what I did with my resolves, my righteous indignation, and, above all, with my con-

The Lure of the Chiffoneer

science. As to my conscience, I cleared that. I wrote to the matron, warning her that in assigning Mamie to any place, it should be remembered that, valuable as Mamie was in many ways, she had a light-fingered tendency to collect household goods. From my later knowledge, I believe that the matron may have smiled at the ingenuousness of that. It might readily be thought superfluous to warn the expert physicist that water does not run up-hill.

As to my righteous indignation, it may seem to you a poor thing, but it never came back. Somehow I never quite forgot the grip of Mamie's hand on mine that day, and her hoarse voice as it announced the total ruin of her hopes; or the memory, by contrast, of her little singing dance before Anne at a happier season, with Anne leaning forward holding delightedly to the sides of the tub.

He is not apt to be the most severe in correction who has suffered much discipline at the hands of Fate. It should be remembered by the unrelenting and conscientious disciplinarian who judges me, that I had seen the ruin of some of my own hopes. Joys that I had

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planned for full as eagerly as Mamie, delights that I had reared on more likely foundations, had been swept away, and almost as suddenly. I am entering here on no philosophy, I am merely stating facts; and I may as well confess that I took comfort in the thought, that, though the bureau, the washstand and the "chiffoneer" had fallen in the general ruin, Mamie still had the sheets, the pillow-cases, the towels, the muffin-rings, and the rest. It was even turning out a little like a fairy-tale after all, for I really now wanted her to have these, and in view of my own very meagre circumstances and my duties to others, I could not with a clear conscience have afforded to give them to her. She, as with a magic foresight, had contrived to relieve me of all embarrassment.

Meanwhile, I heard nothing more of Mamie. Then one day, I had this letter from her (I omit the independent spelling):—

"I thought I'd write to tell you that Anne has a good Papa. He's a farmer. I'm married again." (Since she was not married before, the "again" may refer to a second wedding ring.) "He's got a nice house. Do come

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and see me." (Here followed very careful directions.) "I'd like you to see our animals. We've got five chickens, one rooster, a cat and a dog. He had a house already furnished. It's good furnished too. The bed has got shams on the pillows."

It was not long after this that I had a letter from an old aunt of Mamie's, of whom Mamie had several times spoken to me, and to whom she used sometimes to write. The aunt said that, though she had always been too poor to do anything for Mamie, still she took an interest in her. She knew I had been good to her. If it was n't too much trouble, would I write and tell her how Mamie was, or would I send her her address if she was not with me.

I wrote her with a good deal of pleasure that Mamie was happily married (I did not quibble at the word) to a well-to-do farmer; that she had a nicely furnished house, some animals, and that her husband loved Anne devotedly; and I gave the desired address.

Then I wrote to Mamie and sent her her aunt's letter; and I told her that I thought it would be a kindness if she would write to the old lady.

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In reply I had the following: "I know you meant to be kind. But I'm sorry you wrote to my aunt. It was n't my aunt at all. It was Bill."

Here also — I know it well — fact is less satisfactory than romance. There should, no doubt, be the telling scene of a sequel. I never saw Mamie again, however, and the unfocused waving of a fat, lovely little hand in that crowded terminal is my last memory of Anne.

You who read this may be in some uneasiness as to Mamie. I confess that I am not. I cannot forget the angels of grace that do undoubtedly attend on such. If you will simply review what I have told you, I think you will see that we need not be too anxious. One who can set aside social customs and laws which the less privileged of us do not dare to ignore; who can be married without clerk or benefit of clergy — rather, after the manner of the owl and the pussy-cat, by the mere procuring of a ring; who can protect her child from drowning by a canton-flannel charm; improve health and digestion by a diet of burned bread-crusts; rise above all fact and experi-

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ence as successfully as if she were a witch on a broomstick; and preserve her faith unspoiled, despite the most blasting circumstances; who hob-nobs on such easy terms with the Deity, and who can speak of her whom the poets prefer to name "Star of the Deep," and the devout, "Queen of Heaven," as the Deity's "Maw-ma"; one who can, like a prestidigitateur, by a mere turn of the hand, make your conscientious resolves vanish — and draw pity out of the place where solemn indignation should have been, as magicians rabbits out of a silk hat; who can carry off your much needed linen, and have it look like a favor — Need we worry about such a one? Need Pharaoh, having seen the wonders, be anxious, do you think, as to how the departed children of Israel would be maintained in the desert places where he would so easily have perished?

But lest you should, nevertheless, have Mamie's welfare at heart, and should entertain, with some misgivings, thought of what may have become of Anne, there are yet other signs and wonders of which I shall ask to be allowed to speak.

VI

MARGARET

MARGARET, Mamie's successor, was a woman in the middle forties. There were little shadowy modelings in her brow which made you think of the smooth hollows of a shell. She gave one the impression of something cast up from the sea and dragged back into it many times. She came of a large family, and although her people had treated her badly (according to her own story), she took pride nevertheless in speaking of them. "Me brother Pat," I may say, was never spoken of without her head going up. She had a taste for distinction, and pride of race was strong in her. She was a born teller of tales. One of the best was of a wake to which she was taken as a child.

"It was a grrrand wake! The folk from all arround were there! And they'd baked meats such as you'd have only in the rrrichest houses here. I was eight year old. I went with me brother Pat. The dead man had been a mean old man, savin' and hoardin', not spendin', even for the poor. They do say the dead'll come back if ye worry them enough; and it's

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likely it worried him something terrible to see all that spendin' of his money, and all the neighbor folk he hated so, crowded so close in his room and the dhrrrink goin' round. Anyway, however be it, as I was lookin' at him from my corner, all eyes, for I'd never seen a dead man before, God save us! up he rose from the dead, right among all the candles, upsettin' some of them; and he screamed, yes, screamed, too, like he'd just escaped from hell, with the devil's fingers still hot on him! Some went by the windys, some by the door. Five got broken legs gettin' out, and the priest, God save us! fell down dead, and him a good man, too!"

This was but a small piece of ore from a rich mine. Give her but the chance — she had a story for every occasion.

She went on a tour of inspection when she had been with us a few hours. I felt sure that the beauty and meaning of the old run-down place, of necessity hid from the profane, would never be lost on one of her keen and psychic temperament. She came back glowing, and I thought really reverent.

"Oh, it's a noble place," she said. "You

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can see plainer nor your eyes, it's been lived in by the gentility! Look at them gables and them chimneys! That house has the air of a grand lady, ma'am, sittin' quiet with her hands folded. And them elms, too, like the grand slow wavin' of a fan. Them parlors with their long windys have got the air of havin' seen folk. Me brother Pat worked for a place like this once." This with her head up and looking all round. "There's a rich squire lived here at the least," — with her eyes narrowed shrewdly and her head nodding, I can give you no idea how knowingly. "Yes; and belike maybe a lord. And there were ladies (seems I can see them, God save me!) and little childer, I'll give warrant, little childer that knew how to behave themselves in the like of these rooms. Don't it look dreamin' now, ma'am? Would n't you say it was thinkin'?" This with her head on one side, listening, it seemed, for the unseen presences to go by. By and by she brightened, and came back to the present: —

"There's but one thing about it all I don't like, ma'am. It's the way ye keep your pig. A sty way off from Christian fellowship is no

Margaret

place to keep a pig. They're the childer of God, the way we are. We kept our own, ma'am, in the old country as clean as your hand, so we could have it friendly in the kitchen with us. I'm fond of animals, ma'am — the puir things that can't talk!"

Besides her great fondness for animals Margaret had an extraordinary understanding of them. She had a way of talking with bird and beast that lent reality to the legends of St. Francis. The "Sermon to the Birds" is no more intimate, nor that to the fishes more appropriate, than the daily admonitions she gave the pig, the counsel she tendered the chickens, to which they listened with grave attention, the pig as if hypnotized, his two fore feet planted stolidly, his eyes fixed upon her; the chickens with their heads turned considerably, now on this side now on the other, and with little guttural comments of question or approval. The wolf reputed to have put his paw in the saint's hand seemed infinitely less legendary to me after I had seen the pig, released from his pen, follow her to the kitchen stoop, and, with manners as gentlemanly as he could counterfeit, eat out of a pan she held

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for him. When he had finished, she offered him her hand, as if to pledge him to further good manners; and he made a clumsy pawing motion and managed with her help to get a hoof into her palm. She gave it a grave shake and released it.

"You're improvin'," was all she said; while the pig, delighted, no doubt, with his new accomplishment, took to his four feet, with squeals of delight, around the corner of the house.

One day there came from about her person a strange chirping, a trifle muffled, like the chirping of a tiny chicken. She absolutely ignored it. She held her head stiff and high, as she was wont to do when she served us or when she referred to "me brother Pat." But when she saw that the day could not after all be carried by a mere haughty ignoring of facts, she spoke.

"Poor little uneducated abandoned fowl, ma'am, to cry out against its own interests! I'm sorry, but I could n't leave it in the cold. So, for the love of its mother and God's mother, I'm carryin' it in me bosom to keep it warm. And I'd think you'd be offended if I did n't

Margaret

believe you're a follower of Him that carried the lambs there too!"

It was in such ways that she left you no argument, disarmed all objection, and pursued her own way and predilections, as the saints, the poor, and other chosen of the Lord have, I believe, always done.

Loyalty was, perhaps, the largest part of her code; but it was based rather on the assumption that you were hers than that she was yours. Guests came seldom to that old house; but the welcome she gave them when they did come was a thing to warm the heart.

She assumed a devoted possession of me and my affairs. When these fared ill, she was as Babylon desolated; when they went comparatively well, she was overjoyed, her step lightened, her head went up; she was as a city set upon a hill, that cannot be hid. But it was toward those whom she took to be my enemies that she really shone. By shrewd guesses and by dint of a few downright questions, she figured out that a deal of sorrow and calamity had come to me through the selfishness of others. That was enough for her! Might the Lord

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smite them! Might a murrain seize them and their cattle!

"But they have no cattle, Margaret! They live in a very large city."

(It was always a temptation to see how she would right herself.)

"Then may devastation befittin' them fall on their basements and their battlements! May their balustrades burst and a sign of pestilence be put upon their door-sills! And — now God forgive me — whenever He's willin' to take them — for it's He would know what to do with them," — this with a fierce knowing nod, — "He has my willin'ness they should go! I'd think it a fairer earth without them, and I'd greet the sun the friendlier in the morn'n' for knowin' he'd not set his bright eye on them."

Many batter-cakes were stirred to rounded periods of this sort, and omelettes beaten the stiffer for her indignation.

Once it came to her in a roundabout way that illness had fallen upon one of these whom, for my sake she despised. She looked shrewdly at something at a very long distance, invisible to any but herself, winked one eye very delib-

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erately, with incredible calculation; then nodded her head slowly, like a witch or sibyl.

"*What* did I tell ye! The currse is beginnin' to work!"

Funny as it was, there was something awful in it too.

"But, Margaret, I don't wish them any ill. I don't believe people make others suffer like that if they are in their right minds. Perhaps they think they are doing right."

"Of *courrrse* they do! If they ever could think they were wrong, there'd be salvation for them! But you see how clear it is that they're doomed to destruction!"

"It's slow waitin' on the Lord," she said one day wearily. "And oh, it's meself would like to stir them up a little cake befittin' them!"

I know she thought me a weakling as to hate. But for the insuperable difficulty of several centuries, I believe she would have left me, to ally herself with the Borgias.

When she had been with me some time, she had a serious illness. She had been subject to periodical attacks of the kind, it seems, since her girlhood.

"I did n't tell you," she said simply, "for

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if I had, ye would n't have engaged me; and I liked the looks of ye." Then, triumphantly, "Nor was I mistaken."

This was the beginning of a system of appeals, searching and frequent, which yet never took the direct form of appeal.

"It's I can't be sayin' how I love this old house," she would say irrelevantly one day; and the next, "Me brother Pat has been very kind to me at times — at *times!*" — here a slow wink and nod at the invisible, — "but it's not your own, God save me, that'll do for you in misfortune! No, ma'am, it's not your own!"

She began giving me little presents, a lace collar first. I insisted that I would rather she kept it herself.

"God save us! And all you've done for me!" Her tone was almost despair. "And you would n't let me do that for you! A bit of a lace collar!"

The next time it was a strange mosaic cross; and the next, a queerly contrived egg-beater; again, a very fine and beautiful handkerchief — all of these produced from her trunk. She always had some ingenious tale of how she had come by them.

M a r g a r e t

Meanwhile her attacks were becoming more frequent. At such times she was like one possessed by some spirit. Her mind would wander suddenly, always to her childhood and the Green Isle. She would be calling the cows home at evening, or talking to the pig. When the "spirit" left her, she would be trembling and almost helpless for days, and needed much care.

When she was well enough for me to leave her, I went to see her doctor and her people. The first suggested the almshouse: the others thought that they were not called on to keep her unless she would agree to do exactly as they bade her do, and would renounce her proud ways.

Of course I kept her with me. There are extravagances of poverty which may be allowed, as well as of wealth. Something, too, must be conceded to the spirit of adventure and recklessness. It may be at this crossroads that the provident will bid me adieu. I am sorry to lose their company, for, despite their lesser distinction and certain plebeian tendencies, I like the provident. But before they determine to depart, I may be allowed to wonder whether

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they have ever been in such close relation with the poor as I was then. Have they ever felt the persistent appeal of a Margaret, I wonder, or seen her eyes go twenty times a day to them as to one who held her fate in their keeping? I think perhaps they will not have overheard her say to the pig in a moment of half-gay thankfulness, "Arrah! God save us! are ye glad as ye should be ye're with people that have got a heart?" Or perhaps the provident will scarcely have been vouchsafed a terrible understanding, as I had at that time, of the dark possibilities of life, or have known what it was to wonder where the next meals would come from.

"But," argue the provident, "could she not have gone to her people?" Which, being interpreted, means: "Should she not have taken thankfully the grudged and conditioned charity, with dominion, offered her by those in more fortunate circumstances?"

And to that I answer, "If you think so, then I can only judge that you know little 'how salt is the bread of others and how steep their stairs'; and I can but refer you to one who has spoken immortally of these matters."

Margaret

One day, when she had been ill for more than a week, I told her that she might stay on with me and be cared for, and have a certain very moderate wage, and do only such little light work as she felt able to, all the heavier being taken over by a stronger woman.

She pricked her head up and spoke from a white pillow, equal to fate once more: —

“Now, God save us! If it is n’t always good that be growin’ out of evil! I’ll be yer *house-keeper!* And who’ll ye have for a cook? ’T is I’ll be keepin’ the keys of things! Bring along the cook! Black or white, I don’t care. *I* kin manage her!” (This threateningly.)

This was alarming, but I counted upon inspiration and ingenuity when the time came.

I found a West India darky, whose condition also needed improving. She was a fine type. She might have walked out of the jungles of Africa; magnificently powerful, a little old. She was as irrevocably Protestant as Margaret was Catholic. I urged each of them privately to remember that they were both the Lord’s children and therefore sisters. Augusta accepted this in solemn religious spirit, — such a speech on my part bound her to me forever, —

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but Margaret took it with a chip on her shoulder.

"She can call herself a Christian if she likes, but it is an insult to the Lord, for she's nothin' better nor a heathen! Black like that!"

"But, Margaret, you said you would not object to a black woman."

"No, ma'am, nor I don't!" said Margaret, veering swiftly after her own manner; "it's her pink lips I can't shtand."

This was the beginning of their warfare; which, not inconsistently, was made infinitely more bitter by Augusta's fixed resolve to be a Christian.

Augusta had a predilection for hymns, one in particular, whose refrain could be heard wailing and poignant and confident at odd moments:—

Oh, what a Father, oh, what a Friend!
He will be with you unto the end.
Oh, what a Father, oh, what a Friend!
He will be with you unto the end.

Margaret, like most of those of her creed, had a small opinion of hymn-singing, and haughtily indulged in none of it. Moreover, she had in very strong essence that secure

Margaret

sense of election and special grace common with some of her faith. Let others attend mere temples and mitigated meeting-houses, and presume to call them churches if they like; let others take dark risks of undoctinal salvation! Such spiritual vagabondage must by contrast give but the greater assurance of security to those elected since the beginning — a peculiar and a chosen people. It can be seen, therefore, how Augusta's confident appropriation of the Deity, with her reiterated boast of friendly intimacy, wore upon this daughter of antique distinctions and ancient privileges.

There was, of course, soon established a strongly vicious circle; for, when Margaret became excessively trying and difficult to deal with, Augusta would console and fortify herself with the reassurances of this particular refrain; whereas, at the same time, this particular refrain having the effect of rousing Margaret to still worse and worse moods, these, in turn, made the consolations of the refrain even more than ever indispensable to Augusta.

I do not know, I am sure, what would have been the final result of it all save for the pig.

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When Margaret's limit of endurance was reached, she would come out of the house, sometimes with her hands over her ears, and make off at a kind of trot in the direction of the pig's habitat. There, I am inclined to believe, she was able, after her own manner, to find consolation and assuagement in her unrivaled place in his affections, as well as in the friendly, grave, and undivided attention which he always gave her.

Impossible as Margaret was, I could see that her appealing and lovable qualities played on Augusta as they had long played on me.

"The poor afflicted soul!" said Augusta; "look at the poor thin temples. You don't know, ma'am, how I pray for her every night!"

Margaret, passing by unexpectedly, overheard this and cried out, —

"Oh, God save us! Then I am lost! The Lord will abandon me now for sure! He'll never forgive me such company! That's the wurst yet!"

Then she went off for another of her long conversations with the pig. When she came back she was in a changed mood.

"Don't mind what I say," she said to me.

Margaret

"If God can forgive me, I don't know I'm sure, why you can't!" Then she put a rosy-cheeked apple beside Augusta. "And I think you'll find this pleasant to the taste."

Remembering the Borgias, I should have been loath to taste it; but Augusta bit into it with immediate Christian forgiveness. Yet late that afternoon the wind had shifted again into the old quarter. Happening to go into the woodshed, I found Augusta there crying.

"What in the world is the matter, Augusta?" I asked.

"I'm crying," she said, anticipating Shaw and Androcles, "because I'm a Christian and I can't strike her!"

She raised her old bloodshot eyes, not to me, but to heaven. I have seen the same look in the eyes of an old dog teased by a pert mongrel, and crippled and rendered helpless by rheumatism as was Augusta by her Christianity.

It was Margaret herself at last, who announced that she would be obliged to leave me. She spoke with a dignity which she had held over, I suppose, from regal years submerged but not forgotten.

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"It's I will have to be goin'; I've stayed as long as I can. I've stood a great deal, — for ye'll stand a terrible lot for them ye're fond of, — and I've been terrible fond of you, more than of me own — and am to this day. But I can't honest say it's of your deserving! There's a sayin' that we love best them that mistreat us most, and I'm for thinkin' it may be true. I'd have stayed to help you, but I must be havin' *some* thought of meself! Though you've treated me as I would n't treat me own," — this tellingly, — "and asked me to live under the roof with one of them the Lord has abandoned, yet I've a kindly feelin' in me heart still for ye, and if ye were in need and ye'd come to me, maybe I would n't say ye nay — I don't know. I'm a forgivin' disposition, more than is for me own good, God knows! I've hated yer enemies and ddoomed them to destrhuction!"

I patted her hand good-bye between two perfectly well-balanced desires to laugh and to cry. She was so funny, so incredible, so bent, since the foundation of the world, on proving herself right and everybody else wrong. She was not Margaret, merely, whom chance and

Margaret

trouble had brought into my path — she was a very piece of humanity, decked out in unaccustomed bonnet and unlikely feather, best petticoat and a grand pair of black kid gloves — humanity, the ancient, the amusing, the faulty, the incredible, the pathetic, the endeared. And it was as that that she rode away in the funny old jolting farm wagon, her chin in the air, her eyes glancing around haughtily, scanning the old place she had loved and clung to, but scanning it scornfully now, as if she had never laid eyes on it before, and were saying, “Ye puir thing! — with yer air of delapidation! Who — God save us — are you?”

I went back into the kitchen and caught Augusta wiping her eyes with her apron, and was not altogether gay myself — while Margaret jolted away fiercely, our two scalps at her belt.

“You must n’t worry too much about her, ma’am,” said Augusta soothingly; “the Lord is her friend, and He’ll take care of her.”

From incontrovertible precedent I felt sure that He would, with a sureness I had never had as to my own less considerable destiny.

All this was some years ago. By a curious

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chance, — which has the air of being something more considerable, — it was while I was writing these very paragraphs about Margaret that I had a letter from her, the first since she rode away. It was very characteristic, written in a scrawly and benevolent hand: —

“Will you please let me hear, ma’am, whether you’re dead or alive. I’ve had you on my mind, and for six weeks I can’t sleep night or day for thinking of you.

“Your old servant,

“MARGARET.”

Let no one tell me that this is mere coincidence. New proof it is, to one who has long dealt with the poor, of strange powers of which they are possessed. Here is a sister, I tell you, — “plainer nor your eyes,” — to the old blind man, who used to come tap-tap, tap-tapping up the shadowy stairs and into the nursery for the penny I had withheld.

Margaret had come back also. Useless to suppose that I could hide from her in the silence and shadows of the intervening years. She had with her shrewd eye found me out. She had come, like the blind man, not to exact

M a r g h a r e t t a

money of me, no; but like a witch disembodied, and through the mail, she had come to levy a more precious tax — to collect as of old the old sympathetic affection; the old toll I had paid her so often before; the tribute she had demanded and received times without number — not for labors rendered, no, nor for accountable values received, but rather by a kind of royal prerogative. Indeed, I take it to be a thing proved, to which this is but slight additional testimony, that these are, how much more than kings, — and it would seem by the grace of God, — sovereigns and rulers over us.

But there is still further testimony, of another order, which I feel called on to bear.

VII

MARGHARETTA

WHEN we first went to live in the country, in the old house of which I have written, we had a sufficiently large task merely to make the house itself livable. But as time went on, we attempted to do a very little farming.

How greatly did this broaden and extend

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my experience as to the poor! There were the boys from ten to sixteen who came (again, these were those whose condition needed improving) to do work on the farm for the summers: Joseph, the Hebrew, who from his long and elaborate prayers should have been at least a priest of the Temple; Lester, so practised in picking locks and purloining that it was sheer waste of genius to place him in a home like ours, where jewelry and other returns for his skill were so slender. He did the best he could with the circumstances, but how meagre they were, after all!

There was the little girl, too, who could dance and recite and sing ragtime, having done so in vaudeville. Our home offered her neither audience nor stage, nor was there a footlight in the house. And there was the young Apollo, who at the least could have shepherded the sheep of Admetus; we had no sheep — only one cow.

Then there was Ernest, capable of really heroic devotion. How far did our possibilities fall short of his gifts! I did not engage him — he engaged me. I was setting out the disadvantages as usual, when he blurted out gener-

Margharetta

ously, "I like you, and I am going to take this position!" He was blond, German, of the perfectly good-natured type, and of heroic proportions. But, like the ancient heroes of his race, he was fond of the cup that both cheers and inebriates. I used to remonstrate with him and received always one answer, given stubbornly: "You know I'd jump in the river for you!"

I tried my best to show him that what was desirable was, not that he should fling himself into the river, only that he should refrain from the cup! Useless, useless! He wanted a more royal opportunity. To be sober, trustworthy, honorable, daily dependable — these were too trifling! Give him something worthy of his powers! The unlikely and surprising were pleasing to his temperament. He would how generously neglect his work to bring home from the field rabbits, which he shot with an old muzzle-loader, requiring days of toil before it could be got to work at all. Once he produced a pheasant. Lacking the Nemean lion, he butchered a pig, and smoked the pork for me, by an incredibly laborious method, under two barrels, one on top of the other.

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He hewed down trees with terrible strokes, and built me with Herculean effort a corn-crib of gigantic size to hold a handful of corn he had raised.

All these things, while I appreciated them, left his grave fault uncorrected. But to rebuke him on this score was to quarrel with Hercules for some trifling mistake in his spinning. "You *know* I would jump in the river for you!" he would reiterate.

There really is something ample in their conceptions of life which goes beyond our small bickerings as to honor and honesty. There is a largeness about them which makes our code look small indeed.

After Ernest's departure, another came for a few months, who had surprising resources. He made a practice of bringing me gifts from I do not know where — strawberries, asparagus, and other delicacies, given him presumably, and for the most part, by gardeners of gentlemen's estates in the outlying land — "friends of his."

I suggested, with misgivings as to ethics, that I ought to pay for these things; but he smiled benevolently, as a king on a subject,

Margaretta

and with a manner as bounteous. I had the impression that the world was his.

In the face of his generosity, I felt my behaviors to be feeble and inadequate. These were bounties of a kind to which I was unaccustomed and parvenu, I who had none of the ancient quarterings which would have entitled me to such gratuities; I who had been brought up to the deplorably plebeian idea that one must pay for what one takes.

These are occasions, when, frankly, I am at a loss how to deport myself. I do not know the behaviors befitting. My etiquette does not go so far; and Chesterfield, who covers so many points, stops short of this: he says nothing on the subject.

Oh, royal ways! Oh, fine prerogatives! What hope have I, who am but descended from the founders of a mere country, from men who fought and poured out their blood rather than pay for what they did not receive — what hope is there that I shall ever attain to that gracious and lordly company which receives, as a right, that for which it does not pay!

I have named but a few of these princely characters and their deportments; but remem-

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bering them all and weighing all their values, I believe that "the brightest jewel in my crown wad" still be — Margharetta.

I have never been entirely certain that Margharetta was not descended from the Bourbons. Her husband was in jail for theft, and was a poet. "I will show you some of his poetry," she promised me in the first five minutes of my acquaintance with her. "Some of my friends say he is as great a poet as Shakespeare."

Like Marie Antoinette, she had three children. Her husband's misfortune had made it necessary to put these under the care of others. She talked of them incessantly, and assured me that no heart could bleed like a mother's.

As we drove up from the station, she looked all about her, with the air of a Siddons.

"Would n't Ethel enjoy this scenery!" she remarked, still very grand, but almost awed, it seemed. "She's such a poetic child!" (Ethel was the oldest, a little girl of ten.) "And these trees!" she said solemnly, as we entered the grave lordly shadows of the hemlocks. "Would n't Richard enjoy them, now!" (Richard was the Dauphin, aged six.)

Margharetta

When we at last got to the house, and she entered the kitchen in her grand manner, it seemed to grow large — as the lintels and chambers of the Greeks are said to have done when the gods visited them. The walls seemed to widen out, and the pans and kettles took on a shining stateliness. I have difficulty when writing of her to keep myself to fact, so gracious, so spacious, was her manner. I know, for instance, that her dresses all dipped a little at the back, yet I have the greatest temptation to say she wore a court train, so much was that the enlarging impression that she at all times conveyed. She was the most dominating personality, I believe, that I have ever known. Like a French verb, she seemed to cover and account for all possibilities. She reminded you of the infinitive, the subjunctive, the future, the indicative, the *plus-que-parfait*. Entering the dining-room, her handsome hands bearing — always a little aloft — the corned beef or pot roast that should have been a peacock at the very least, she conveyed, silently, time and tense and person, passive and active: “I am”; “let us love”; “let us have”; “thou hast”; “I have *not*”; “*if* I had!”

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Early in her career, I asked her what deserts she could make.

She turned her full Bourbon eyes on me. She had no need to lift her head: it was constitutionally, structurally high.

"I can't make any," she said, with firmness and finality. "We bought all *our* desserts at the delicatessen."

So, without anger, only with dignity, she managed to put me in my place.

Added to the many unconscious appeals that Margharetta was forever making to me, she finally made a direct one. Informing me once more that no heart could bleed like a mother's, she begged to be allowed to have, if it were only one of her children with her, the little girl aged ten. I consented, and went myself to fetch her.

She was a beautiful child. She had a great deal of Margharetta's own handsome, insolent beauty, but she had in addition a craft and ability for lying and deception astounding in one so young. Ten years old by the calendar she no doubt was; but by sundry other reckonings, she might have been ten thousand — a strange, pathetic, puzzling little girl.

Margharetta

For a time Margharetta's heart was staunch-ed. But ere long it began to bleed afresh for the one who was, it was now clear, her dearest — Richard, the little Dauphin. She would stand looking out of the window, the picture of wretchedness. "He is such an angelic little fellow! I can't begin to tell you! Oh, if I could only see him! If I could only have him in my arms once more!"

I make no apology. I only tell the event, perhaps a little shamefacedly. It was not long after this that I went and fetched Richard also.

If his sister was ten thousand, Richard was, I think, of prehistoric origin. He had carried over from the Stone Age a strange ability for having his own way at heavy cost. He had never been in the country. His passion for flowers would have been a hopeful and poetic thing, had it but been accompanied by a knowledge of what flowers were. He would appear in full rapture, bearing a huge bouquet of young bean-plants or a large nosegay of freshly planted cabbages. Never, despite my faithful efforts, did he lose his passionate love of flowers, and never, despite my equally faithful endeavors, did he learn to know what

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flowers were. I think that they were to him anything that could be gathered with greatest ease in largest bunches. With this definition in mind, it will be seen that a vegetable garden offers superlative opportunities.

Margharetta could see in all this nothing but a newly interesting phase of her darling. I was there when he brought her his third generous bouquet. She took it into her gracious handsome hands, held it off a little, then appealed to me for appreciation: —

“Now, is n’t that his mother’s boy? He brings everything to *me*.”

I had explained to Margharetta before, that, right as filial affection undoubtedly is, the gathering of young tomato-plants from the garden had come to be fearfully wrong. I now repeated this severely, then addressed the Dauphin direct.

“You are never, *never* to gather anything from the garden again; do you understand?”

Back went the Dauphin’s head suddenly; his face became a purple mask of tragedy; his eyes rained intolerable tears; he broke forth into a most wild and tragic wail.

Margharetta stooped, gathered him to her

Margharetta

bosom with one of her finest gestures, lifted him sobbing in her arms, laid his head against her shoulder, held it there with a possessive queenly hand, and with a colder look thrown at me, I am sure, than ever the Bourbons threw at the mob, carried him upstairs.

Later she explained to me haughtily what the Dauphin had meanwhile explained to her — he had been *told* to gather those plants.

“*Told* to gather them?”

“Yes. Come, lamb, tell just what Tony said to you.”

“Tony said,” began Richard, a little breathless, but resolved, and twisting and braiding his fingers as he spoke, “Tony said, ‘You can have *all* the flowers you want, *every* day, and I think your mother would like the tomato-plants best.’”

This sudden opera-bouffe turn of affairs really took me off my feet. When I suggested that it was quite certain that Tony would contradict Richard’s statement, Margharetta’s reply was perfectly consistent. Did I suppose she would take the word of “a no-account Eye-talian” against that of her darling?’

So I found myself once more face to face

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with that total disregard of fact and probabilities which I had now come to know as one of the leading characteristics of her class. It was for me to remember that miracle waits upon them; that nothing is improbable to them if it but coincide with their desires; that truth shall not serve them unless it goes dressed in their livery. Nothing could be done about the matter. We were at a deadlock. What were mere logic and reason? What are they ever, in the face of a faith chosen and adhered to?

Margharetta stood firm in an unshaken faith in her own, while I departed, to wonder why it is that humanity deports itself as decently as it does, with these dark powers, not only at work in it, but hugely at work in it, all the while.

The days went on. In the course of becoming acquainted with the country, the little Princess and the Dauphin underwent, of course, many tragic adventures. Though they had me so well in command that I ran to do their bidding, or flew to their rescue, at a mere summoning shriek, wind, water, fire, cats, dogs, cows, horses, poison ivy, snapping tur-

Margharetta

ties, and sundry other folk were not so bid-dable.

This recalcitrancy led to tragedies innumerable. When either or both children were hurt by some fact or reality which by mere royal habit they had haughtily ignored, and when they were beaten in the fray and wounded, Margharetta was as one bereft of her senses. Panic seized her. She flung herself upon my mercy and my intelligence. She wrung her hands. She was distraught. She could do nothing herself for her darlings, but was wild with gratitude, and watched with tragic animal eyes everything that I was able to do for them. How wonderful I was at such moments! How could she ever thank me! Then from my ministrations she would receive into her arms the battered Princess or dilapidated Dauphin, as it might have been from the hands of a relented Providence.

My own glory lasted only during the danger, however. Her darlings secure, she was not long in reascending her throne, and continued to behave with entire consistency as to her probable ancestry. She was the only real queen, with all a queen's regality and insolence,

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that I have ever dealt with. It is clear to me now that I was hypnotized by her manner to think it a privilege to be of use to her in the calamities of herself and her family. It is true I did at last make a fearful revolutionary stand for liberty, and bundled her and the young Princess of ten and ten thousand and the little prehistoric Dauphin off one day, and began as best I could to reconstruct life; but not before I had come fearfully near, in the Versailles manner in which Margharetta had conducted herself and our kitchen, being a "condition" myself.

It is now five years ago, "of a sunny morning," since they left us, and the post brought me the other day a short letter from Margharetta enclosing a "poem" by her husband, on the death of the little girl. She "wanted me to know." I feel quite sure that the letter was divided between sorrow for her loss and pride in her husband's performance.

The circumstance touched me more than I would have supposed possible. I thought of course of a mother's "bleeding heart." Poor Margharetta, for all her queenliness and all her disregard of fact, brought at last with the

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humblest of us to face the one supreme reality; and weaving as best she could some fancy about that, too, and turning away her face from it toward some consolation of reunion which (the verses promised this) was to be given her in another life, and, I doubt not, also toward the pride in this life of being wedded to a man (let us waive the matter of the jail) who could write poetry, and was, some thought, "as great as Shakespeare."

VIII

THE POWERS OF THE POOR

THAT the poor have strange, one might almost say occult, powers, seems to me proved. The downtrodden with whom I dealt were, so far as I could judge, the very pies and daws of existence, who, one might reasonably suppose, would be grateful for whatever hips and haws and other chance berries the bleak winter of their calamities left them. Nothing could be further from the truth. They lived, rather, it would seem, on canary seed and millet, maize and sesame, not obtainable in the open mar-

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kets of the world. I fell under the strange delusion that they were to labor for me, and that, for a wage agreed upon, they were to relieve me of care. Again, how wide of the mark was this! They expected to be looked after like queen bees, and they *were*! I myself laboring from flower to flower for them, and filling their cells with honey.

You may think them as stupid as you like, and as inconsiderable. Deal with them but long enough, and you shall have strange suspicions. You shall begin to note a growing and undeniable likeness in these to "Cinderella" and "The Youngest Brother." Nor are these fairy tales, mind you, safe and unbelievable, shut up there in your Grimm and Andersen on the shelf, to be taken down only at pleasure; no, but fairy tales potent and indisputable, hoeing your potatoes, walking about in the flesh in your kitchen, and hanging out your clothes of a Monday.

There is, indeed, some royalty about this class that bodes as ill for us to ignore, as it is alarming for us to contemplate. If the Lord be for them, — and there is every reason, historical and romantical, to suppose that He

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is, — who then can be against them? Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel, but these can never be lowered! These, I take it, are in their own manner imperial spirits, let kings and royal successions be what they may. Here, without cabinets or ministers, or executive or administrative cares to weigh upon them, yet with what authority they go clothed!

It is astounding, if one only becomes poor enough, — I say it in all soberness and sincerity, — how rich and powerful one may become. And perhaps just here it is my duty to submit a testimony I have up to this time withheld. I have said that I myself have been poor, but I have as yet said nothing of the strange unlooked-for loftiness that this circumstance lent me. While I was of the wealthy, I strongly maintained that these, and what we are wont to call the “upper classes,” have the very considerable advantage, and believed it with all my heart. But no sooner was I downright poor, uncertain even where the next meals were to come from, than the potion, the charm, the necromancy, the delusion, or the truth, — have it which you will! — began to work, and I myself to

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have a subtle suspicion, and at last a positive sense, of superiority.

Who never ate his bread with tears,
He knows ye not, ye heavenly powers!

The wealthy, the advantageous began to dwindle in my eyes. How poor they were in real experience, in sympathy, in understanding; how wanting in fine feeling; how destitute, for the most part, of that only wealth worth acquiring, — wealth of the heart! — whereas, the poorer I was, the greater the wealth of understanding that was mine; as my moneys dwindled, I was made rich of the universe; a new sense of love and bounty was given me as by an unlooked-for legacy. The vast tired multitude going home at night, all these suddenly were my own — my brothers and my sisters; further, it may be noted, I acquired the wealthy also. These too became my brothers, more chill and starved sometimes (I knew this now) in their luxuries than the “poor” in their destitution. Could one, indeed, knowing any of the real values, feel a bitterness toward such? or could one fail to experience, having known any of the true humiliations of life, a love for these also?

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Let it sound as paradoxical as it may, — I do not say it unadvisedly, — poverty is an enrichment, and often enough a grandeur. Here, indeed, in this fact — I think it by no means unlikely — may lie the explanation of many a humorously high behavior and lordliness in those of whom I have more particularly told. If this be truth, as I take it to be, then it lends consistency, even if a little quaint, to what threatened to seem but unwarrantable chaos.

Is it not probable, remembering my own experience, that Musgrove, Mamie, Margaret, and the others had with their very indigence acquired a compensating fortune and, by reason of their very destitution, inherited, as by lofty bequest, the universe? It should not be forgotten, moreover, that I had come to these distinctions only after years of comfortable living, whereas those I have told you of had been born to the purple of their poverty. I, in serving others, have never yet been able to give myself the ample airs of a Margheretta. I have never found it possible to pull pennies out of people's pockets by the Æschylean tragedy of my condition, or to draw pity at

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will out of their hearts. I am smitten with silence when trouble and difficulty assail me, and I have an intolerable instinct against asking for the sympathy and commiseration of others; whereas those better accustomed than myself, — as I have shown you, — how readily are they able to requisition your sympathy, to appropriate wholly your pity, and to confiscate your possessions, your theories, and your ethics!

Yet we, mind you, in the face of these abilities, have assumed them to be our inferiors, and have organized for them frankly a society for the improvement of their condition! That we can mitigate their sufferings and inconveniences, lessen their cold or their hunger, I willingly admit; but I am not of so bold an intellect as to believe that we can improve their condition, or that their condition, take it for all in all, can be improved upon.

If you doubt such testimony as I have borne, and think it too personal, there is other more general and considerable. Were not Egypt and all her power despised and triumphed over by "a colony of revolted Egyptian slaves"? Did not proud Rome go down,

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also, to a like downtrodden people? Picture what Rome was in her might — Rome tracing her ancestry to the gods! And then look upon her bowed down in slavish subserviency to kiss the shoe of a poor fisherman!

And the poor then, who called themselves Christians — as now you would have called them underlings, menials, subalterns. Yes, and so they were. And they lived precariously in caves and catacombs under the surveillance of the emperor's guards, as our most scurvy poor under the police. Yet see them to-day, with dominion over palm and pine, and with control of the earth's continents. And where now are the Roman emperors?

History teems with such instances. With what scorn do you suppose the mighty Persians in their glittering armor might have looked upon those few youths who in the dawn "sat combing their long hair for death" before Marathon? When the nameless poor murmured outside the gates of Versailles, what would any of us have given for the brief lineage or trumpery royalty of a Marie or a Louis? It would not have sold for a franc to any one with a head for business. Even as

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these poor people shook the gates, almost the haughtiest queen of history was already on her way, then, and at their bidding, to become the Widow Capet. And that, too, for only a little while, and by sufferance, before they hurried her on to the last level of all.

There may seem to be about them at first a marked futility. Only wait, and you shall see what a power they have! Is there need that they should pique or plume themselves or strut? They have no need to cut a dash. The herald's office could add nothing to their stature. Here is no newness or recency, no innovation; here rather are tradition, custom, something time-honored, however little you may think it venerable. Here is immemorial usage, "whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary."

And have these continued in the world in predominating numbers, despite misfortune, calamity, catastrophe? No; mind you, rather because of these! Think of a race with that ability! Since Cain fell into misfortune and was shielded of the Almighty, and Lazarus, for a like reason, lacked not a divine advocate, have these not had the special protection of

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God? Can you show me any people of lands and property, of thrift and saving habits, of full granaries and honest provident stores laid by, who were guided by a pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night? who had manna and quail supplied them; and an entire land swept clean of its rightful owners by the Lord's hand, so that they might come into it instead, to enjoy the wells they had not digged, and the fruits thereof which neither had they planted?

Were it not of too great a bulk, the testimony of literature could be brought to corroborate that of history. When you read "The Jolly Beggars," you are informed without squeamishness which is the most free and powerful class in the world; and when you have read that other document by the same hand, "The Twa Dogs," you have perused a fine bit of testimony as to which is the happiest. Or if there lacked these, and there were left us but Arden and its gentle beggars — who could be in doubt? How they triumph over the rich and the successful and lord it felicitously in their poverty! What would you look to find these but broken and saddened — these who are not only beggars, mind you, but wronged

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men: the Duke, Orlando, Rosalind, all suffering injustice; Adam starving; Touchstone, Jaques, Amiens, and for the most part all of them, too well acquainted with the rudeness of the world; men who had known but too well the unkindness of man's ingratitude, the feigning of most friendship, the bitterness of benefits forgot. And yet, turn only to that first scene in the forest. If ever I set eyes on independent gentlemen, here they are! And who doubts too, reading of these, that Shakespeare wrote of them out of his own Arden, out of the enrichment of his own poverty, and the splendors of his unsuccessful years!

The powers of the poor! This is a matter to which I have often lent my speculation, and have striven to perceive by what rights, as of gods in exile, they have maintained their dignity and their supremacy; and I have wondered whether one of these may not be that necessity laid upon them to touch more nearly than we the realities of life. We have set guards at our gateways, to turn away Poverty or Misery or Cold or Hunger, yes, and Human Brotherhood and Life and Death themselves. Death, it is true, and some others, will not

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be altogether gainsaid, but enter at last into the lives of all of us, bringing invariably— this is to be noted — a great dignity to the house which they have visited. But to the poor the “heavenly powers” come, whether welcome or no, and like the gods visiting mortals, they do not depart, save from the entirely unworthy, without bestowing enrichment.

I have sat at the table of an old Philemon and Baucis, whose condition of poverty appeared not to be bettered by their entertainment of the great realities of life; whose pitcher poured as scant as ever it did, though Death and Calamity had but lately visited them. But when you thirsted for a better draught, a draught not to sustain the body, but the spirit — then, then the miracle was evident enough! They filled your cup to its trembling brim, nor, pour as they would, could they empty their hearts of love and understanding.

These are, indeed, good gifts, and of the gods, and there are many others; and it would take little to prove how much more bountifully the poor receive of them than the wealthier classes.

Another possession, which I have noted

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often among the poor, is that gayety, that lightness of heart, that almost inconsequent gayety, so often seen, amazingly, among them. Where you and I might be crushed by calamity, they can raise their heads and be glad, and that over some trifle. Where you might have gone sad and sober for weeks, Mamie could dance her little ragtime songs; Margaret could be gay with the pig; and Margharetta, fresh from a new downfall, could gather the children of her heart to her as a hen its chickens, and in blissful content think nothing of the morrow. This I have seen again and again. They are as recuperative as King David. Let them sin and blunder and suffer and be cast down, it is but for a brief season; soon you shall hear the plucking of their harp and the sound of their psaltery, and a new song unto the Lord.

As further testimony, this is, I believe, the place to confess that it was not in the days of my prosperity and happiness, but in the days of my poverty and sorrow, that I myself became possessed of this good gift of the gods. The laughter and gayety of heart of prosperous years, though they may be of no mean

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order, seem to me but pallid things compared with those of a more tested season. To have seen the total wreckage of one's hopes, to have known despair and the bleak winds of the heath of the world, and to delight still, and more than ever, in the little and the gay, and to taste with a keener relish than ever before the fine-flavored humor of the world, this is to be rich, though one were in tatters; this is to be gifted, though to the last farthing one has been robbed.

But there is another endowment besides all these, even more precious — I mean that unconscious grace and dignity of spirit possessed by some of the poor; I mean that quiet and gracious acceptance of a lot which, to our reckoning, seems but bare and difficult; that gentle and persistent kindness of men and women toward a world which, it seems to us, has so roughly and spitefully used them.

This I take to be the greatest of the gifts that the gods confer upon the poor; and being so, it is fitting that it should not be indiscriminately bestowed. You shall not meet it commonly or often; yet here or there will be found some true ruler of his kind, looking out

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on the world with this kindly and gracious spirit. I have known some few such myself, and one notably; though my acquaintance with him was but of short duration, yet it summed up for me and made whole the fragmentary virtues of the poor, and set a lasting seal upon my love and understanding of them.

IX

HORATIO

I SAW him first selling papers by a subway entrance. The day was cold, and he had that peculiarly pinched look of those who are both ill-nourished and ill-clad; and yet you could not without presumption have called him pitiful. There was a kind of simple grandeur about him which I am at a loss adequately to describe: a thing rather to be embodied in myth and legend.

The "envy of the gods" has been variously set out in tale and story. Prometheus defying divinity is a moving enough figure, hurling curses back at his superior, and visited by Asia, Panthea, and the nymphs and Oceanides. But it would need a new legend, it seems to

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me, to embody that loftiness which, in a similar bondage, hurls no curses, breathes no complaint, nor asks even to be spared, if that be possible; a gentleness which, without the least leaning to humility, preserves a generous outlook, triumphant in its persistent kindness as Prometheus in his unconquered might; unbroken, unlowered; bound, yet attaining somehow to a continued generosity and bestowal.

It might seem, by the look of this man, that Fate had come to hate one she could so little bend; for not only was he ragged and pinched, but there was about his delicate face and the great slenderness of the body, only too certainly, the mark of some physical ravage, and of an overborne endurance. To the casual observer, he was but a man selling newspapers at the entrance to the subway; to those of thoughtful and speculative observation, he was a man standing within a few feet of his grave, and likely at almost any moment to feel on his shoulder, or dimly on his chilly hand, the summoning touch of Hermes, Leader of Souls.

There was about him a most amiable patience and courtesy which had not at all the

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color of resignation. Indeed, to speak of resignation in his case would have been to impute to him riches and hopes he had not. I can give you no idea how much more courteous he seemed than his destiny. The only Asia who ever visited him, I am sure, was a woman, fat and comfortable looking, who sold papers also, at the other end of the subway entrance, behind the shelter of its glass. She used to come over sometimes while I was buying my paper of him, to ask him to make change, blowing on her hands in a wholesome manner, or beating her arms like a cabby. That she never sympathized with him, I felt sure, not alone because of the general look and contour of her, but because — as I have tried to show you — he was not the man to whom one would presume to tender sympathy.

As I came to know him better, I began to take the keenest pleasure in his smile, which was always ready. He never let the salutation go at a mere "good-morning." To my banal "Pretty cold to-day!" he would reply smiling, and even while turning his shoulder to receive the cut of the wind less directly, "Yes, but bracing"; or, while his blue fingers fumbled

Horatio

for change, "Not quite so cold as yesterday"; or it was, "Well, the children like snow for Christmas"; or, "This snow will give work to the poor, cleaning the streets"; or, if the white flakes turned to threads of rain, "This will save the city a great deal."

There never was any bravado in this, only the incomparable gentleness and the winning smile. If Fate lingered about, malicious, hoping to hear him at last complain, she might as well have given over her eavesdropping. I, going to him for the daily "Times," and not infrequently with a tired spirit and a heavy heart, would find that, in return for my penny, he had given me, not only the morning paper, but a new courage, or a heartening and precious shame of my own discouragement, or, oftener still, a new faith in the world. So it was that he stood there, day after day, in the freezing weather, dispensing these benefits, a peculiar and moving royalty legible in his person.

If those who read of him here pity him, it can only be because my words give but such a poor idea of his great dignity. Those who saw him with a clear eye, could they pity him, do

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you think? And I — I who had cried out more than once, under how much less provocation, against the duress of fortune — was it my right to give him commiseration? Marry, heaven forbid! Again and again, as I went from him, my mind suggested, rather, noble likenesses, and sought to find some simile to match him. Once it was, "The gods go in low disguises"; again, "Great spirits now on earth are sojourning"; and once the words of Amiens, addressed to the Duke, seemed to me to blend in with his behaviors: —

"Happy is your Grace,
That can translate the stubbornness of fortune
Into so quiet and so sweet a style."

And again, I thought once that the royal Dane, addressing Horatio, offered me words befitting: —

"For thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
A man that fortune's buffets and rewards
Has ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled
That they are not a pipe for fortune's finger
To sound what stop she please."

One day I bought him a pair of woolen gloves, and all the way to his corner I kept rehearsing an absurd speech of presentation,

Horatio

designed to relieve both him and me of embarrassment. He must not know that I had bought them for him! I wanted to spare myself that! So I concocted what is currently known as a "cock-and-bull" story; but, as I look back on it and its results, I lean to believing that I never perpetrated a finer bit of fiction. I give it now without shame.

"My husband," said I, fumbling for my penny, "has been very ill — a long while."

"Well, now, I'm sorry!" said Horatio gravely, and without the least wonder, apparently, why this should have been proffered.

"And the doctors think," I stumbled on, digging in my purse, "there's no likelihood in the world at all he will be out of his bed before the summer."

"Ah, that's very hard for a man if he's active," said Horatio, speaking with full sympathy, as of one who knew.

"And *so*," said I, putting my penny in his hand, taking the "Times," and mentally bewhiskering me the clumsiness of language, "and *so*, you see," — here I brought them forth, — "there's a pair of gloves of his he won't have even the chance to wear; and they're *almost*

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as good as new, and — I just thought — may be —”

Here words deserted me. I appealed directly to his eyes. These were fixed, kind and gray, on the gloves. He was already taking them.

“Indeed, I’d like very much to wear them,” he said, “but I’m sorry he can’t be wearing them himself. May be he’ll be well sooner than you think, though. Sickness is a bad thing. These are very warm,” — this with his delightful smile, and he began drawing one of them on, — “I’m very much obliged. But may be he’ll be well sooner than you think. I’m sure I hope so.”

It was a busy morning. The early subway was pouring forth its crowds as an early chimney, just started, its smoke. I was glad to mingle and fade among them.

The next morning, he was ready, may be even a little eager, as I approached. He had my paper doubled and waiting for me, and waiting too, his gentle inquiry, “Is he better?”

“Yes,” said I, “I think so — a little.”

Some one else wanted a paper and we said no more. But each day after that he asked me, and I gave him a cautious, not too enthusiastic

Horatio

report, for my patient must remain indoors till sharp weather and all possible need of gloves were past. So, he was only a *little* better. I took pains once to add, "A long illness is very discouraging."

"That it is," Horatio assented. "But you'll forget that when he's well."

So we continued in our courtesies and our sympathies; I very pleased and hardly conscience-stricken, to have been able to give him what I knew he must have cherished a good deal more than the gloves, something, indeed, for the warming of his heart — the chance, say rather the right, to extend his so experienced sympathy, and the opportunity to give, to one in need of them, some of the stored-up riches of his spirit. So, his own days growing short, and the shadow of his own cares lengthening, he yet smiled daily, as he gave me of these riches, and wished me a happy sunrise of my hopes and a good-morrow.

One day he was not there. His fine spirit had fared forth. I can still feel the shock and sudden loss it was to me. I went over to Asia, or Panthea, selling her papers, and questioned her. Was he ill?

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"He went very sudden, ma'am, I believe. His wife came to say so. I'm selling his papers now. What will you have? The 'Times'?"

Hermes, the kindly, had beckoned him from his "undefeated, undishonored field," and he had gone, eager and gentle there, too, I have no doubt.

It was but a little while that I knew him, but the influence of him abides. He has lent something to life which even the least noble cannot take from it. The sorry old derelict, his poor old red lantern eyes looking out of his dark face, when I give him a dole, receives it, not from me, I think, after all, but from some gentleness which Horatio lends me as a legacy.

He was, of course, supreme of his class; but by that very supremacy he made plain to me many things concerning those less than himself, but of his same lineage. It is by no means unlikely, I think, that Musgrove, Mamie, Margaret, Margharetta, and the rest, so much less worthy than Horatio, yet glimpsed their heritage also, though in some dim adumbrated manner of their own, and were unconsciously affected and aggrandized by it.

Horatio

Although I have spoken of them throughout with lightness, and have laughed at their amazing follies, yet I know well that there is a solemnity forever attendant upon the poor. There is without doubt some unexpected endowment in suffering and privation, some surprising enrichment in the common lot. Have it as you will, there is no honor so high, or distinction so covetable, as to be a sharer of human joys and sorrows, and an intimate, even though it be in misery and solitude, of the hearts of men; and to this brotherhood, sharing the common lot, the poor undeniably contribute by far the greater numbers.

There is, to the very end, something tinsel and tawdry in the trappings of special privilege. The splendors of the wealthy are but a brief pageant — stage properties, donned for a little while to lend some height and dignity to those of but human stature after all. The beggar who looks on, as did Horatio, at this pageant, without envy, and who, looking on, gives a gentle patronage to the rich, does so not without warrant. The greater splendors and possessions are his own. Let them decorate their stately halls; let them transport, as I

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have known them to do, entire ceilings from Venetian palaces, tapestries from chambers of those who also, long ago, once were great — the glory of the sun will not be subsidized, the halls of the morning are lit with unmatched splendors, and the palace chambers of the night are hung by mightier ministrants with tapestries of a finer weave, and ceiled with stars for the mere vagrant and the vagabond who shall sleep some day beneath them, without monument and unremembered.

Do not these know life more nearly? Who has flattered them? Who has shielded them from infancy, from the great powers? Who has defended them? Have not these, like *Œdipus* and other kings' sons, been exposed upon the very rocks of time; and have they not survived that circumstance? Have these not dealt more intimately with the elements? Who had enabled them to avoid the cut of the winter, or to evade the stroke of the summer? to elude the arrows of sickness that fly by night, or the pestilence that walks in the noonday? Sorrow and Death have dealt with them more nearly, and without ambassadors. They have had audience with reality; they

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have talked with Life without interpreters.

He who loves this world, and has found it good on such terms, may be allowed his reasonable preference; he who speaks fondly still of life, who has had such communings, may speak with some authority. Horatio's smile was worth the pleasantness and optimism of a thousand who have never made change with blue fingers, or shrunk from the cut of the cold.

There are those who would patronize and pity such as Horatio. It can only be, then, that they know this world but little, and still childishly count riches to be but money, and poverty to be but lack of it.

And if you tell me that none but a sentimentalist would call poverty an enrichment, then I can only assume that you have never been poor; and if you tell me that the high behavior of Horatio is at the best but endurance, even then, could I grant you so much, the argument still would hold. Even so, Horatio endured life with a noble grace, and helped others to do so; even so, he was able still to find pleasure in a fate from which the wealthy would shrink in horror, and lovable traits in one they would have called his bitterest enemy. He

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had blessed the life which had cursed him, and had loved it though it had despitefully used him.

So he triumphed — yet without pride; nor did one hear in his spirit's victory any hint of animosity, or talk of reprisals, or bitterness, or demand for indemnities, or hidden hate. Rather, he was to be found each day undefeated in his impregnable gentleness, that still unfallen province in which he dwelt. His were some incalculable riches of the spirit which Poverty had heaped up and amassed for him through those years when his fingers handled without complaint the miserable pennies; his was some towering strength under the disguise of the weak and broken body; like that Olympian glory fabled inevitably to appear some time, under the mortal humility of gods in exile. There was about him, for all his slenderness, something grand, something epic, and allegorical. He might have stood as a symbol of a downtrodden people, such nations as the world (be it said to our shame) sees still, and that not in small numbers — crushed, oppressed by the arrogant, the strong, yet still surviving and giving to the other nations their gifts of gay song or heroic endurance, and

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out of an incredible bounty still bestowing love and kindness and beauty on the world which has behaved toward them without mercy.

Look, if you will, at the beggar nations of the world, and search the heart of the poor among peoples, and I am convinced that you will find in these also corroborative evidence of truths I have tried here to touch upon but lightly. Let be their follies and their mistakes and all their incredible assumptions: who shall declare that poverty has not enriched them likewise? And among them, shall you not find high and royal and single spirits, who, like Horatio, have both known and loved the world and triumphed over it without animosity? To have known and yet to have loved the world! Is not this the real heart of the matter? Is not this the true test after all, and the indisputable mark of a king's son? And shall you not find it oftener among the poor than elsewhere? For he cannot be said to know the world who has never been at its mercy; even as only he can be said to have triumphed over it, who, having suffered all things at its hands, yet loves it with unconquerable fidelity.

GUESTS

I

RELATIONS OF THE SPIRIT

IN his essay on "Character" Emerson points to the mutation and change of religions and theological teachings, and then thunders characteristically, "The moral sentiment alone is omnipotent." Now, Emerson never takes away anything traditional and cherished, but he puts something nobler into your hands in place of it. Hear him: "The lines of religious sects are very shifting, their platforms unstable; the whole science of theology of great uncertainty. No man can tell what religious revolutions await us in the next years." Then with thundering assurance he gives us the coveted reassurance. "But the science of ethics has no mutation. The pulpit may shake, but this platform will not. All the victories of religion belong to the moral sentiment."

I wish it were given me to speak with some such force and truth of what we are wont to call education. Theories are very shifting; the

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whole science of instruction is of great uncertainty. No man can tell what pedagogic revolutions await us. But the educational value of life has no uncertainty. Schools may come and go; this, the school of life, remains — the greatest of them all. The highest attainments of mankind are due to its teachings.

In still another essay, Emerson, depicting, we suppose, the ideal not the academic scholar, declares with the same tonic forcefulness that "his use of books is occasional and infinitely subordinate; that he should read a little proudly, as one who knows the original and cannot therefore very highly value the copy." Always, life is to Emerson the greater art, and learning, literature, and all other arts whatsoever, but lesser things. "You send your child to the schoolmaster," he flings out, "but it is the schoolboys who educate him."

Precisely. When shall we have taken wholly to heart the so obvious truth? It cannot be but the author of the "Greatest Show on Earth" was right. The world *likes* to be humbugged; else why all this elaboration of educational systems and theories, educational forms and creeds, this multiplication of mod-

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ern methods and "didactic material"? These are, indeed, but things that change and fluctuate, and already are on the way to being superseded. Meanwhile the older and larger schoolroom of Life never closes its doors, makes no bid for patronage, retains its old teachers, changes its methods not at all, and still turns out the best pupils.

My own education is generally thought to be above the average. It is my belief that it would be far less considerable but for those various circumstances which in my childhood denied me much schooling, and accorded me a good deal of staying at home.

The home of those days had, it is true, a far greater educative value than can be claimed justly for the home of the present day, owing mainly — I hold it almost beyond dispute — to the fact that it was more given to the practice of hospitality and the entertainment of guests.

Of the homes of my day my own was, I believe, fairly typical. Though a full description of it and of the men and women who frequented it would make a colored recital, so would a like description of the homes of many

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others besides myself, who were children also at that time. I do not mean that such homes were entirely the rule; yet there were enough of them certainly to constitute a type. They were not likely to be luxurious; those of people of less position nowadays are far finer.

The old house of my childhood was a large and comfortable one, with low-ceilinged, well-proportioned rooms, and wide verandas. Its furnishings were in taste, and contributed greatly to its character. The big Holland secretary, with its bulging sides and secret drawer, was a very piece of romance; the tall clock, with its brass balls and moon face, the old clawfoot mahogany tables, the long scroll sofa, the heavy scroll mahogany sideboard, were as mellow in tone as the old Martin guitar on which men and women, beaux and belles of a past generation, had played; or the harp that stood in a corner, all gold in the afternoon sunlight; or the square Steck piano of the front room, a true grandee in its day. Several really well-painted portraits looked down from the walls, and added a certain stateliness to the warmth of every welcome.

Many people, recalling that home, have

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spoken to me since of a peculiarly warm and beautiful light which on sunny days was present in the three lower rooms — parlor, sitting-room, and dining-room — that opened one into another.

This light, which had first to make its way past maples and a few pear trees, entered, it seemed, with an especial graciousness, touching softly and lingeringly the old mahogany as it went; and from morning until late afternoon abode in the rooms with a kind of mellow gentleness hardly to be described. There was something well-mannered, unobtrusive, in its coming and going, as though it were conscious of being a guest there; a kind of gracious enjoyment it seemed to take in the place, noticeable in its gentle behaviors among the dark colors and the old books, and in its manner of moving about delicately from object to object, and pausing at last, as it always did, before the tall pier-glass, as though it pleased it to reflect on the three long rooms, doubled to twice their length, before it slipped away again past the western windows and departed across the hills.

I have mentioned carefully the perpetual coming and going of the sunlight because it

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seems to me symbolical of that coming and going of guests which perpetually lighted the old house, lent it its chief charm, and gave me my most memorable schooling. The educative value of life has no uncertainty. These men and women who came and went as guests were my first memorable lessons of life, and, as I take it, they were lessons marvelously well adapted to the understanding and needs of a little child.

I would not seem to undervalue the silent influence and worth of that material loveliness which was often found in the old houses of that day, and was evident in my own home; but I believe this alone could have done little to educate me. Such loveliness was but a means to an end. I would be loath to give great credit for my education to the furniture, old and interesting as it was. The real credit is due, first, to the customs of that time, which made hospitality one of the first virtues; and, second, to the guests who, coming there, furnished the house with its best opportunities, and incidentally — I beg you to note that word — afforded me, there can be no doubt, the better part of my education.

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How far have we gone, "progressed," as we say, in a short span of years! I am still a young woman, yet guests are not indeed what they once were. There were poverty and riches in those days, too, but the "high cost of living," that phrase forever turning up nowadays, was a bad penny not yet coined, and guest-discouraging "flats" were anomalies that my old home town rejected.

Guests came and stayed then as they do not now. Visiting was still in those days one of the accomplishments of life; a gracious habit not yet broken up by ubiquitous hotels, ten, fifteen, twenty stories high; not yet rendered superfluous by trains every hour on the hour, or old-fashioned by scudding automobiles which, like Aladdin Abushamut's magic sofa, snatch up whole parties of people, and in the twinkling of an eye set them down in new lands with hardly time for greeting or farewell.

Life may be more provident, compact, convenient nowadays. I am not prepared to dispute it. But of one thing I am certain: the modern child in this almost guestless age has no such chance to acquire a broad education out of school hours as had I, whose childhood

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flourished when guests were the rule and the tinkling of the doorbell was more likely than not to be a summons to a fine adventure in visitors.

Ah, there was an education! An education indeed! Its A B C was that every child of the house should be delighted to be turned out of his or her bed, to sleep four in a four-poster, or on a mattress on the floor, so that one more guest might be given welcome. Its simple mathematics were concerned mainly with the addition of guests, the eager subtraction of one's own comforts, the multiplications of welcomes, and the long divisions of all delights and pleasures, which by some kind of higher calculus miraculously increased the meaning and richness of life. Its geography, if any, was no geography at all, beyond the fact that the guest-room was the sunniest and largest and best in the house, and that exports from all the other rooms flowed into it and rendered it the most desirable and the "most important city." As to history, it consisted of people at all times and of all ages, and the traditions of men and women of many types. It concerned itself, not with the succession of kings and

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durations of dynasties so much as with a succession of visitors and the probable length of their stay.

I cannot say what enlightenment or learning or benefit the guests themselves derived from these visits; though, if measured by the frequent length of their sojourn, these must have been very considerable; but I do know that we, the children of that household, gained high benefits immensely educative; I know that we assimilated much knowledge, and attained to much learning of a very high order, intellectual and spiritual; and what is best of all, I know that in that old home, antedating and long anticipating Madame Montessori and her "Houses of Childhood," we learned with neither desk, blackboard, nor semblance of schooling, and never for a moment so much as dreamed that we were being taught.

This is not the place to enter on a discussion of the Montessori method. Briefly Madame Montessori's chief tenets may be stated thus: Liberty for the child; a careful education of the child's senses, resulting in an extraordinary sense-control to which the child attains without consciousness of learning.

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The "didactic material" (frankly so called by the author of this distinctive system of education) is material by means of which the child's senses are trained. It consists of many parts. To name only a few — there are one hundred and twenty-eight color-tablets; thirty-six geometrical insets; three series of thirty-six cards; the "dimension material" consists of nine cylinders, each differing from the rest in height and diameter, ten quadrilateral prisms, ten four-sided striped rods, and so on. This and much more is the equipment daily used in the "Houses of Childhood."

The home of my childhood was bare, bare of such things. Neither cubes nor cylinders were there that I remember, nor thermatic tests, nor color-tablets, nor quadrilateral prisms; and yet —

What was there of especial value? There was, first of all, the household. "The household," to quote Emerson further, "is a school of power. There within the door learn the tragi-comedy of human life. Here is the sincere thing, the wondrous composition for which day and night go round. In that routine are the sacred relations, the passions that

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bind and sever. Here is poverty and all the wisdom its hated necessities can teach; here labor drudges, here affections glow, here the secrets of character are told, the guards of man, the guards of woman, the compensations which, like angels of justice, pay every debt; the opium of custom, whereof all drink and many go mad. Here is Economy, and Glee, and Hospitality, and Ceremony, and Frankness, and Calamity, and Death, and Hope."

Didactic material enough, if one chooses to call it that. But, besides all this, there were guests — guests who came and lingered, guests of an almost incredible variety. By recalling a few of them I can best explain somewhat of their influence on my life.

The first one I remember very clearly was a beautiful young lady, — beautiful to me, — who spent I believe about six months with us. I might have been a trifle over five years old. I remember her with great exactness. Certain sparkling characteristics that she wore as noticeably as the several heavy rings on her white hand, shine still with surprising clearness in my memory.

She was slender. She affected overskirts.

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She wore elbow-sleeves, and trains, though she could hardly have been over eighteen or nineteen. Her hair was plastered on her fashionably high forehead in what were then known as "water-waves."

On a collar of box-plaited lace she often wore a jet necklace, set in gold, a kind of jewelry much in fashion at that time, I believe. Also I remember that she had a pair of lemon-colored kid gloves; and on dress occasions she wore heavy gold bracelets.

But these were all as trifles to the fact that she sang. That was her crowning glory. My mother sang sweetly, too, the beautiful songs of "her day": "Flow Gently, Sweet Afton," "Lightly the Troubadour," "Ye Banks and Braes," "The Gypsy's Warning," "Roll On, Silver Moon," "Believe Me If All Those Endearing Young Charms" — and many more. When she sang them, she played on the old Steck piano or softly plucked the strings of the old Martin guitar — simple and trill-less accompaniments.

But you, Miss Lou Brooks! You, oh, you! — compounded of every creature's best, — could sing the old and simple songs, if you

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chose, and very graciously, for any one who asked for them; but better still if, left to your own preference, you could take your seat how languidly at the piano, how gracefully play a prelude in which the white jeweled hands followed each other up and down the keyboard over and under, in what moods and fancies, in what rippling runs and rapid arpeggios; now lighting to flutter in a twinkling trill, with jewel-flash, like whirring hummingbirds; now resting humble, two meek white doves, in the long and waited-for preliminary pause. *Then*, you could break forth at last into what burst of passion and fire of song!

I can close my eyes still and see her. I have not a good memory, but the words come to me almost unerring across the past (and I have to remind you that I was a little over five years old): —

“The stars shine o’er his pathway!

[*Long pause, with the white hands quivering on the pressed keys!*]

“The trees bend back their leaves,

[*Languid softness*]

“To guide him to the meadow

Among the golden sheaves;

[*Trills and expectancy!*]

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"Where stand I, loving, longing,
And list'ning while I wait
To the nightingale's sweet singing,
Sweet singing to its mate.
Singing! —Singing! [*The last, soft like an
echo*]
Swe-e-et singing to-oo its mate!"

[*More trills and arpeggios to send shivers of delight over
you — then in a new measure.*]

"Come, for my arms are empty,
Come for the day is long,
Turn the darkness into glory; —
The sorrow into song!"

[*More pauses of which you were glad — then a begin-
ning again of all delight.*]

"I hear his footfall's music;
I feel his presence near,
All my soul responsive answers
And tells me he is here!
O stars, shine out your brightest!
[*This with eyes cast to where the stars should have been*]
"O nightingale, sing sweet; —
To guide him to me waiting
And speed his flying feet; —
To guide him to me waiting,
And speed his flying feet!"

This was what they did in a world outside
the walls of my childish experience! — they
sang like that! — of such things! I did not
know what it meant save in some incomplete

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half-lunar way; but its effect drew me, and, like the seasons and tides of the moon, changed the face of the earth for me.

Further, it should be noted that I heard this song, not only on one occasion, not detached, isolated, as at a concert. Here was nothing paid for cold-bloodedly at a box-office; here was something all woven in with the daily chance of life. I heard the song many a time. I might come upon it unexpected when I woke from my nap. I might be drawn from my toys by it to the more desirable pleasure of standing big-eyed by the piano while such glory as this rolled around about me; or eat my bowl of bread and milk in the early evening to the accompaniment of it; or try to keep the Sandman on my pillow from throwing the last handful of sand until the final note of it was sung.

Miss Brooks was, I believe, the daughter of an army officer. She had lived in various parts of the world; common on her lips were tales of a life wholly different from that which I knew.

To my eyes, water-waves and all, she was incredibly beautiful. Moreover, — and here you see the fine discriminating points which

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children make, — she was engaged; already selected; chosen; set apart! I cannot tell you what glamour that lent her in my eyes. Child-psychology is not a thing that always can be reduced to measurement of reflexes and the like. I responded to all this by some unmeasured law of the soul. This knowledge and appreciation of her — or of her type, if you prefer — was as distinct and yet intangible a thing as the light of the prism. The sun fell on her and was changed to color. I could not touch or define her charm, but it was there; and the color and wonder of it seemed to fall across me too as I sat near her, and upon my sun-browned hands, if they touched her, until I could see colored jewels of rings on them too, as there might be, and as I hoped there would be some day.

I thought then that I was fond of her. Certainly her word was law to me. I know that I used to run my little legs tired to wait upon her. Her smiles and favors were precious to me as only the favors of the beautiful and the gifted can be to a little child. The tap of her fan on my cheek or my hand satisfied me altogether with life.

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But I was too near her then to judge of her fairly. I know now the truth of the matter. I have never seen her since. The glamour of her presence no longer colors and impedes the white truth. She was *not* the most beautiful young lady in the world, as I so generously took her to be. She was *not* the only person in the world who could play dazzling accompaniments, and sing to melt one's soul, and make one a stranger to one's self. She was *not* the only one in the universe who knew the dim and lovely secret chambers of a little child's nature. She was after all, only, indeed, by courtesy, Miss Lou Brooks. For she was less and more than all this: she was a guest; a passing influence; an ineffaceable impression; a glorious experience; a far adventure in new lands; a glimpse into other worlds unknown; a new planet swum into my ken. She was a magic mirror held up to me — one in which I could for the first time clearly see myself as I might be; she was a glass of fashion, a mould of form. In her I saw moving evidences of a world more wonderful than any of my fancy; she was a passing guest in the house, yes, but a permanency in the scheme of things —

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a very piece of life itself; and the knowledge of her, an acquirement in learning and an acquisition in education. The educative value of life has no uncertainty.

Let Montessori children in "Houses of Childhood" feel of wooden circles and quadrangles and be taught with care the words "round," "square"; let them touch sandpaper and know thereby "this is rough," or linen and apprehend "this is smooth." I, a child of the same age, needed nothing of such information. I knew smooth and rough more nearly by the mere chance touch of my play-roughened hand on her fine satiny one; I, of a like age, wholly lacking in cubes and cylinders and color-slabs, was learning nevertheless to discriminate between short and long, heavy and light, were it but by dread of her departure, or the length of her train.

Put beside Miss Lou Brooks and all that she taught me and revealed to me any didactic material you may choose, and I wonder if it compares with her. Place beside her most of the lessons learned from books. The rule of three is useful, but I would not exchange her for it. I might do without my multiplication-

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tables, and indeed do get along without them fairly well, never having learned the seven, eight, and nine tables properly. But these I take to be but subordinate things — pawns, or, at the very best, but bishops and knights of the game, limited to move in certain lines without deviation, and not to be compared with a queen, who can move here or there at will, taking, disconcerting, winning, and setting the whole of life into new relations.

I have named Miss Lou Brooks first because she made the first strong impression on me; but she was only one of many not less memorable. She was indeed but one star in a certain notable constellation of guests, which shone in one quarter of my heavens.

Belonging to the same constellation, though of a different magnitude, was the young German army officer, for instance, who came all the way from Germany, where my brother in his *Wanderjahr* had met him. His visit was short, but the glory of it enduring. I was not yet seven. I remember how he rose out of respect for me when I entered the room; how he clicked his heels together and stood formal and attendant; how he drew out my chair for

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me at the table, and saw me seated with all the respect due an empress. To be allowed to come and sit in my brief piqué dress at table with him and his shoulder-straps was an essay in form and a treatise on self-respect.

As brilliant a star, but of a steely blue radiance, was the physician-scientist, Doctor Highway. He would be classified readily now as a Christian gentleman of highest honor, brilliant gifts, and scientific attainments. But the name scientist was not in those days worn so easily. Huxley and Darwin were old but yet alive, as were many who still believed them to be emissaries of the devil.

Doctor Highway loved truth, he hated falsehood, and this with so much fervor and so little compromise that he was pointed out by some as an atheist. He was perpetually inviting argument, but he, or she, had courage who accepted the invitation. Once, when he expatiated on the marvels of mechanical music-boxes, an older sister of mine, in her early teens, ventured boldly into the open with the tentative remark that, wonderful as such music might be, might it not nevertheless lack soul?

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I can see him still. He jerked sharply in his chair. He flung his penetrating glance at her and at her only. He said, with a sharpness that had all the effect of anger, "*What do you mean by SOUL!!*"

You have seen a too bold rabbit scuttle into a hole at the near sound of a gun. My sister to outward appearances was still there; but to outward appearances only. She was indeed gone, vanished, obliterated, annihilated—disappeared as effectually as though the earth had swallowed her up. I have no record of the time when she again ventured into the open, but I would be willing to think it was not for years.

I remember supper-tables at which his conversations and brilliancy presided. I remember sharp revolutionary statements that fell from him as to Jonah and the whale, the flood; geological testimony as to the length of time consumed in the creation of the world; all given with his fine clear face lit up with a kind of righteous indignation, and his hand brought down at last so that the glass and silver and myself jumped suddenly.

No thunderbolt fell on the house those nights, though I watched for it with anxious

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waiting. Sometimes I think his was the beginning of my own courage; for whatever moral bravery was in me rose, I think, to honor this greater courage of his — a subaltern saluting a superior officer. When he was by I listened, fascinated. In these long years since he is gone, I too have loved truth; and I could wish for him now, sometimes, that the too-complacent guests and cutlery and glassware of our modern dinner-tables might be so startled and shocked by the thunder of as righteous a sincerity.

There was also — how warmly contrasted with Doctor Highway! — the young Byronic musician with the extraordinary tenor voice. He was the pride of his family, and to their dismay was resolved to go on the opera stage. He treated me as an equal and, dispensing largesse, wrote in my autograph book one day, in a fine stirring hand: "Music my only love, the only bride I'll ever claim." Later, it is true, he seemed to have repented his resolve and forgotten the album, for I believe that he claimed some two brides besides music; but this did not alter his educational value; that remained unspoiled.

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There was, too, that great flashing fiery star, Mrs. Rankin, at work at the time of her visit on a drama, "Herod and Mariamne." She had a mannish face; she wore heavy rings on somewhat mannish hands, and was, no doubt, — it is now revealed to me, — an unclassified suffragette, born untimely, denied, cut off by the custom of those days from the delights of militancy, foredoomed to pass out of life with never the joy of smashing a single window.

She talked much of injustice. She had a big voice and a small opinion of men. This it is not unreasonable to suppose they reciprocated with a still more diminutive opinion of her.

One might think from all this that she should have been a pamphleteer. She was not. She was by all odds and incongruities a poetess, driven by the inexorable muse to daily sessions with Mariamne. Mariamne! Ah, what a subject for her — for *her!*

She must have absolute quiet. She must be undisturbed. During her stay we would romp in from our play to find my mother with a finger on her lips. Above stairs Mrs. Rankin might be pacing her room, declaiming, to the

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hearing of her own judicial ear only, the speeches of Mariamne, delivered in the voice of Herod, and the speeches of Herod, in a voice that should have been that of Mariamne. I can still hear the long pace and stride overhead.

Lest her type seem too strange, perhaps, it was explained to us, what Plato explained long ago, that a poet is rapt wholly out of himself and is as one possessed of the gods.

Then, too, which brought her nearer to our sympathies, my mother conveyed to us the more homely knowledge that Mrs. Rankin had had much unhappiness in her life; some Herod of her own, I believe. This secured to her our more willing respect and laid on us more than the ordinary obligation of courtesy. This virtue on our part was obliged to be its own reward, for there was no other that I can recall.

These people, you will note, were not bound to us by ties of blood. They were rather relations, rich or poor relations, of the spirit. I am bound also to tell of other guests than these: of those who by virtue of tradition and blood we more wontedly call "our own"; men and

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women of my mother's and father's families; aunts and uncles and "relatives," as we say.

But before I pass on to these, there is need to mention one more, at least, of the relations of the spirit — that one to me most memorable of them all; the young dramatist-poet, with his flying tie and his heavy hair, to whose romantic name — Eugene Ashton — I would how gladly have prefixed the title "Cousin" had I but been entitled to it; who was nevertheless cousin-german to the spirit of me, or closer still, a kind of brother-of-dreams. He had been into distant countries of the soul — that was clear by a far-away look in his eyes. I used to sit wordless and well-behaved in his presence, but I slipped my soul's hand in his, very friendly, the while; I wandered far with him into realms of fancy, and counted his approval and the merest glance he gave me as very nearly the most desirable thing I could attain to.

I can see him still, and those gray eyes of his, as young as the young moon and as many centuries old; I can still hear his very noble voice, reciting from time to time, as he was wont to do, some of his own verses. Or I can

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see him leaning forward, his gracious body bending into the firelight, to talk over with my sympathetic mother his plans for recognition and fame.

How little we guessed that his life was even then near to its setting! When one sees the morning star in the dawn, or Hesper in the twilight, hanging limpid, golden, one does not wonder will its glory be long or short; so much it holds one with its immortal loveliness, that little thought is given to the near-by day, or the night which shall quench it.

The other stars, Miss Lou Brooks, Mrs. Rankin, and the rest, shone long and high in the firmament of my childhood; but the mellow light of the gifts of Eugene Ashton, like the more splendid Hesper, hung low, already low on the horizon.

I shall not forget that morning we heard of his death. "Eugene Ashton is dead!" The news was not kept from us children. Yet I remember, too, that beyond the first sorrow and shock of such news lay a pardonable pride. He had loved our home; he had found comfort and rest of spirit there. I could still see his gray eyes looking into the firelight,

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and the bend of his gracious body, every inch of him a poet. There, with us, he had dared to be his best and had shared his gifts; his personality had lighted up those very rooms and his voice had sounded in them there where still my daily lot was cast. He had been our guest — to me the most memorable of them all. And now he was gone. Where? A kind of glory followed the thought. He was gone down over the rim of the horizon of life to the land of Death, as splendid there as here. We had lost him, whereas he, you see, had only lost us. It was our lives that were darkened, not his. It was on our lives, not on his, that the night fell. So he also, having been as a "morning star among the living," now, having died, was

. . . as Hesperus giving
New splendor to the dead.

II

KITH AND KIN

So far, in mentioning the many guests who frequented the old home of my childhood, I have named only such as were relations of the spirit. Often these seemed to me more truly

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my kindred than those whose kinship was based upon ties of blood. Yet, as my memory brings before me those men and women of my mother's and father's families, I find myself aware that the bonds of blood are strong, strong.

These came bearing valid claim of right and title; these were not to be gainsaid or denied; these were accompanied by silent, but how indisputable, witnesses of feature and form. Whether I liked them or not, these were "my own."

But their chief power over me lay in this — that they linked my life openly to all that of the past which I could call mine. The older of them, who sometimes laid their hands on my head, touched with the other hand, as it were, the generation already gone. They still carried vivid memories of the dead in their hearts; spoke familiar words of them; or, perhaps, wore delicate pictures of them still in lockets at their throats. The invisible past was theirs visibly.

The Greeks, that people of sound ideals and of incomparable taste for living, did not consent to or admit of the departure of the older

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generation. To the invisible hands of the *lares* and *penates* was delivered the sacredness of the house itself. The spirits of the "departed" commemorated its lintels, kept clean and bright the fires of the hearth, guarded the home from evil if so might be, and gathered into a sweet influence those traits and characteristics and deeds long gone in the flesh and surviving in the spirit in some fine aroma of living.

It was, I believe, somewhat in the manner of the *lares familiares* that the clan of our older "blood-kin," both those of a past and those of a very nearly past generation, added meaning to that old home of my childhood.

My great-aunts and great-uncles brought with them the spirits of ancestors, were, in a sense, abodes of ancestors themselves. An older generation looked out of their eyes; the spirits of men and women long gone still lingered with them. It lent a dignity to life.

We children stood aside while they passed by in front of us. We saw them served at table and elsewhere to the best of everything. To them, too, as to the *lares*, were given the first and best portions of viands. We listened to

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them as though to oracles speaking. It was for us to allow the rivers of their broader wisdom to flow undisturbed by that kind of stone-throwing, pebble-skipping curiosity so noticeable in the average liberated child of to-day. Into their fine flowing streams of narrative we flung no big or little stones of our questions or our egotism. Their talk rippled on or flowed stately.

"We were under full canvas," — I can see the fine-featured old gentleman yet, — "we were in a zone of tempests, sailing round the Horn" — a wave of the hand here, and a pause.

What is "full canvas"? What is a "zone"? What is "Horn"? Indeed, we did not know. Be sure we did not interrupt the narrator to ask — not more than the audience arrests the ghost in "Hamlet" for exact definitions when it mouths out the sorrowful hollow words, "unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled."

The words defined themselves well enough for all practical and spiritual purposes. The mere sound of them was much, and the manner of saying them was much more. We got no definitions of "full canvas," "zone," or

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"Horn," for future reference; but what we did get was a present sense of some of the great allied human experiences — the un-pitying power of the sea, the dread of a soul brought face to face with shipwreck and death, the quick awful moving of the "imminent hand of God," the cry of a coward, the fierce bravery of a brave man ready to fling life away for the sake of his fellows; then, the sense of a great deliverance and what we take to be the mercy of God. And beyond all these, for good measure, pressed down and running over, we had added unto us additional respect for those older and more experienced than ourselves, and the sense of a fine tale told tellingly.

But I would not have you suppose that I found all the old ladies and all the old gentlemen delightful. Some of them I disliked and wished gone. A sense of justice compels me to believe, however, — putting aside all question as to whether they charmed or disappointed us, and considering them only as purely educative mediums, — that these visitors of an older generation are not surpassed, indeed, are rarely equaled, by any theory or practice of modern pedagogy.

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If Miss Lou Brooks and Eugene Ashton and Dr. Highway taught us much of foreign lands and strange worlds and spiritual astronomies; if they instructed me besides in the poetry and romance of life, these others gave me a knowledge and love and understanding of other times, other manners; they were a kind of incarnate treatises in history and ethics, philosophy, and comparative philology.

What a lesson in history and manners was my great-aunt Sarah for instance!

She was tall and stately, a kind of reproof to the shallowness of later days. There was about her the refinement and delicacy of a rare old vase. She had been young once; this my reason told me, for, in her home, a large stone house called "Scarlet Oaks," hung a very beautiful portrait of her, a delicate, very young, translucent face, rising above the shimmering satin of a low-cut wedding gown. But for this I should have taken her to have been always old, in the sense, I mean, in which the piping forms of youth, the "brede of marble men and maidens," on Keats's Grecian urn are "forever young, forever fair." There was such a finality and finish about her,

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like something arrested in its perfection; such achievement, such delicate completeness, it seemed, as could not change! It appeared that, when old age should waste our own generation, that delicate loveliness of her would remain untouched. She seemed already to live above, to survive, what was perishable and trivial in her own day and ours.

She affected cashmere shawls and cameos, and wore long and very elaborate mitts, and was always spoken of as "delicate." "Aunt Sarah is very delicate." That, indeed, she was!

We all waited upon my aunt Sarah, from the greatest to the least. She was very fond of my father, and to hear her address him as "William," and treat him with the condescension one gives to a child, — he who had iron-gray hair, — and to see his eager and affectionate and wholly respectful response, was to see time flow back.

My great-aunt had two brothers, my uncle Hays and my uncle William, who still wore great pointed collars, and black stocks that wound around the throat several times, and broadcloth coats. But my great-uncles, unlike my great-aunt, seemed passing by. There

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was in their somewhat careful, sometimes feeble step a suggestion of treaty and capitulation, and from time to time, in their glance or actions, the pathos of childlikeness so much more frequent in the old of that sex than of the other.

Such types were rare, even in my day. There were only a few, a very few such men and women left then, guests of a twice older generation, visiting still, with a kind of retained graciousness, in the house of life from which they were soon finally to depart. By an enviable fate some six or eight of these men and women belonged to me. An air of grandeur came to the house with them as with the coming of the gods and goddesses in the old days; the human dwellings expanded, and the lintels grew tall.

You can guess, perhaps, whether we children ventured a word! Glory enough to be permitted to come as silent as mice to supper, while they were there!

Yet I would not be misleading. Even those of a twice older generation were by no means inevitably stately and imposing. History is not given over entirely to kings and queens.

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There was, for instance, my great-aunt Henrietta, of the "other side of the house." She was a wholly different type. She was little. She wore three puffs at either side of her face. These were held in place by little gray combs. She knew everybody's affairs, and her chief delight was in recounting them. She was a living chronicle, an accurate, if inglorious, historian; an intimate and personal account, with a mind for little happenings and a prodigious memory for events; a sort of Pepys in petticoats and neckerchief.

She was the oldest survivor of my mother's people. The family tree was in her keeping. But she cared little enough to dig about its deep roots. She took no delight, apparently in the dignity of its stem, or pride in the wide spread of its branches. Her entire pleasure, rather, was in the twittering and whispering of its leaves. There was something bird-like and flitting in her character, and she gossiped like a chaffinch.

In her flowed together the great strains on my mother's side, Spencer and Halsted, names to conjure with. She had, certainly, not less to be stately about than my great-aunt Sarah.

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She had plenty of ancestors to be proud of, and for a touch of romance, had danced the minuet with Lafayette, when she was a slip of a girl and he a guest in her grandfather's house; but she never appeared in the least proud of her people, only unfailingly entertained by them.

It was at an early age that I resolved to model my life after my aunt Sarah rather than after my aunt Henrietta; yet recalling my aunt Henrietta's memorable characteristics, and that about Lafayette, and the delightful side-puffs, and her searching comments on humanity, I am willing to admit that she was perhaps the more vivid lesson of the two. And if one counts the lasting distaste for gossip which I acquired by being obliged to listen respectfully, hours at a time, it seemed, while she continued to profess her little astonishments and "you-don't-say-so's!" to my mother, with the best end of her sentences always finished, inaudible to me, behind her fan, I am even prone to believe her to have been the more influential and educative of the two.

In those days, those days when visits were

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long and frequent, the bond of kinship was firmly established, and family characteristics were strong and vivid. These were *Halsteds*, *Spencers*, *Hamiltons*, *Ogdens*, *Portors*, and not to be mistaken, any more than you mistake now your reader for your speller, your history for your geography.

It seemed, it is true, that they were there but to visit; but how much were they there, though how little were they aware of it, to teach, to enlighten, to admonish! With them came the Halsted or Spencer or Portor imperiousness or graciousness or brains; the Halsted eyes, which were beautiful, and the Halsted tempers, which were not; with them came those obstinate egotisms, those devotions and ideals, those headstrong weaknesses, those gentle fortitudes which, strong in themselves, survived vividly from generation to generation.

My aunt Henrietta, my aunt Sarah and the rest, it was plain to be seen, were the earthly abodes of strong antecedent family spirits; and now, these bodily abodes doomed to decay, had not those spirits, strong and nimble, already begun to frequent the available lives

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of the younger generation, resolved on living yet in the day-lighted world, and visiting still the glimpses of the moon; hopeful, perhaps, in the younger generation, to correct some old folly; or willful, and determined, it might be, to pursue in some younger life the old fatality and mistakes?

This was what it meant, this and not less, when, often a little wistfully, the passing generation remarked certain likenesses. "Mary, how *much* she is getting to be like William!" or, "Do you know, she reminds me of her great-grandmother Ferguson"; or, "She has the Portor eyes"; and sometimes, cryptically, so that I might not guess too clearly what it meant, "Very like the Halsteds."

All those things were, I believe, far more influential and educative than the unthinking will admit. They gave me much food for thought. They roused in me commendable emotions, or salutary dismays. Might I some day be like my aunt Sarah? Was I really like my father? Could I worthily be classed with these others? And traits not to be proud of — was I in danger from these? So cautions and hopes and worthinesses grew up in me under

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the fine influence of what might be called a study in "Comparative Characteristics." There is not alone a dignity, but a tenderness as well, lent to life by such a study of former and passing generations. The results of living much of my childhood in the presence of the past, serving tea to it, offering it the required courtesies, putting footstools under its feet, were, I believe, a certain abiding reverence for human nobility, and a pity for human faults and weaknesses, and more, a desire and hope for nobility in myself, and a haunting dread that some family weakness might reappear in me; and these, as valuable assets to education, I would not rank below the dates of the battles of Crécy and Poitiers, and the siege of Paris — none of which dates, though I once learned them carefully, have remained with me.

There is not space to tell of that nearer constellation of warm and bright stars, guests who were my mother's and father's intimate friends and contemporaries. Even if there were nothing else to recommend them, these were men and women who had lived through the Civil War in their prime. To sit on the knee of my ex-soldier uncle, and know that

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where my head leaned he carried in his breast-pocket a little Testament, with a bullet-hole in it but not quite through it — the Testament having saved his life and stopped the bullet from reaching his heart; and to sit on the knee of another uncle, who actually carried a bullet from Antietam about in his body, yes, and for all that, was the very gayest of the gay — these experiences were spelling-books of a higher order and readings in life not to be looked down on.

There were other uncles, who visited the house only in tradition, but were entertained there how warmly of my eager fancy, — their adventurous lives having ended before mine began, — who were memorable lessons in daring, in courtesy, and in spirit!

There was my uncle Robert, for instance, who, to escape, for his part, from my Chancellor grandfather's stern requirement that all of his seven sons should study law, ran away and went before the mast at eighteen, and at twenty-one came sailing home again, master of his own vessel.

She was called the Griffin. Ah, the Griffin! the Griffin! Though I never set foot upon her

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deck, how well I knew her, masts, spars, canvas, tar, and timber! How often I had stood in dreams, a little figure at the prow, my skirts and hair blown back by the wind, while we sailed the seas, she and I and her gallant crew, under the wise direction of my sailor uncle! How often had we sought and found, across the pathless ways, those places, vague, vague and far away, but known and endeared to me by the wonder and the romance of their names—China and Celebes, Madagascar and Gibraltar, the Azores and Canaries and Shetlands, Hebrides, Bermudas and the Spice Islands, Ceylon and the Andamans, Marseilles and Archangel and Valparaiso! How possible all of them were, how sure of access, without regard to limiting geography! Let but the Griffin weigh her anchor, and her sails be set! How far! how far!

Never mind that the Griffin's master was dead and buried in the sea he loved, before I was born! I contrived to live above these facts, as I did above geography. Could it be possible, do you think, that this my best-loved uncle did not know me when I knew him so well? Was I not, somehow and not-

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withstanding, one of his close kith and kin, on whom he looked fondly? His favorite niece, perhaps with a spirit of adventure to match his own?

There were other uncles besides, with lives full as romantic. I mention only this one, because I loved him best.

There was, further, my mother's youngest sister, who was better than any legend. I would rather have inherited, as I did then, that love-story of hers, than very considerable worldly riches.

Another of my mother's sisters was mistress of a home on Fifth Avenue and of a very lovely country place on the Hudson. She had maids at every hand to wait upon her, and footmen whose eyes looked straight ahead of them, and who wore cockades in their hats. I liked her for herself: her beauty and her spirit and commandingness always stirred me, and she liked and approved of me, besides. Moreover, — let me be frank, — I liked her too, in those days, for the footmen as well. One of my sisters had visited her for nine months, and had, on her return, entirely revolutionized all my ideas of the world.

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But that, rather, which confirmed and established me and my ideals as on a rock, was the love-story of my youngest aunt.

She and her husband had only the most moderate means. They lived in what I like now to believe must have been a rose-covered cottage. But oh, the love of them! She had a mass of wonderful hair which it seems he loved to unpin at night, to see it fall at either side of her lovely face, down to her knees and beyond; and a tiny foot, whose slipper he would allow no one but himself to put on. All reports of every member of the family agreed: these were a pair of perfect lovers; like "Rose in Bloom" and "Ansal Wajoud"; no harsh word was ever spoken between them; they lived wholly for each other, in a blissful world apart, rich in their own manner; where neither poverty, nor distress, nor discord could find them; and where no hand could ever fall upon the latch to bring them sorrow — save only one.

That hand fell — the hand of him gently termed by Scheherazade and other tale-tellers of the East, "The Terminator of Delights, and Separator of Companions."

She came to be with us the winter that she

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was widowed. It was thought the change of air, and perhaps the brightness of our household, might be of some little help. We children were admonished to be very gentle—not to be noisy. Superfluous precaution! She was to me sacred!

She used to walk up and down the upper veranda, taking the air slenderly, a light shawl about her shoulders, her tiny foot pausing now and then for greater steadiness, when the wind swayed her frail body too rudely. I have known many faces since then; I never knew one with a lovelier look. Heartbroken though she was, the depth of her love was daily attested, for there never came complaint or bitter word across her lips; and you went to her, without question, for quiet and comfort, as to a sanctuary.

At first, it seems, she had been pitifully rebellious, had longed and prayed to die (we children knew these facts); but, having been denied so much as this, she rose delicately, and lived on worthy of him, binding and unbinding her hair, fastening her little slippers anew for the daily road and routine of life. Sometimes, with tactful or tactless devotion (I do not know

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to this day which), I would offer to fasten them for her; and she would smile and let me do it, and usually kissed me afterward.

There were years and years when I never saw her. She grew more frail, I am told, and her cheek withered; but to me she was always incomparable, and always "Rose-in-Bloom"; and like Rose-in-Bloom, looking always to one thing only — reunion with her beloved.

"Will fortune, after separation and distance, grant me union with my beloved?" sighs the lover of Rose-in-Bloom. "Close the book of estrangement and efface my trouble? Shall my beloved be my cup-companion once more? Where is Rose-in-Bloom, O King of the Age?"

It might have been her lover who so questioned a mightier king, while she waited far from him, there even in our very house. And the reply of the king in the story would still have been fitting: "By Allah, ye are two sincere lovers; and in the heaven of beauty two shining stars, and your case is wonderful and your affair extraordinary."

It were indeed impossible to explain all that these, the vivid lives of my own, meant to me,

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and what effect they had on what I like to call my education — how much indeed they were my education.

It is usually assumed that, the sooner we get at books, the sooner we shall become educated. I think it a pale assumption. The order might more happily be reversed. I am convinced that it was mainly by my reading of these men and women, with whom the world of my childhood was peopled and whom the gracious habit of visiting brought within my ken, that I came later to recognize and enjoy the best authors and the best literature. I had known Lear and Othello and Hamlet in my own circle, though without Shakespearean dramatization or language. I have already told you how well I knew "Rose-in-Bloom," so much better than the "Arabian Nights" could ever tell me of her. "The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling" was familiar enough to me. I had had it rolled on me by the author of "Herod and Mariamne." I was continually recognizing in books fragments of life, but glorified by the art of phrase or symbol. When I came one day upon the incomparable scene in Capulet's orchard, and those lines, —

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"By yonder blessed moon I swear,
That tips with silver all these fruit-tree tops,"

was I, do you think, a stranger to it? Had I not in real life heard Miss Lou Brooks sing with a full heart and a quivering voice, —

"The stars shine o'er his pathway!"

It will, without doubt, be objected that my childhood was an exceptional one, even for my day; that the average child of the present would certainly have no such characters and types from which to draw knowledge. But this is, I am sure, a false premise. Humanity is a very ancient stuff, and human beings are to be found to-day quite as interesting and vivid as ever human beings were. But there lacks to the modern child the quiet opportunity for knowing and studying humanity at first-hand. In place of long and comfortable and constant visits, we have a kind of motion-picture hospitality soon over, a film on a roll soon spun out; and instead of life with its slower actions and reactions, a startling mere picture of life flashing by.

A short time ago I watched a party of married people and children receive an automobileful of guests at a country house. The guests

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remained something over twelve hours, which is a long visit in these days.

When they came, it was explained by them how many miles they had come that day and over what roads. An hour was now devoted to getting the dust off and to a change of clothes. After this there was much chatter among host and guests, talk of mutual friends, and much detail as to journeying; what roads had been found good, what ones uncomfortable for speeding, with a comparing of road-maps among the men. Then there was luncheon; after that, siestas; after these, a spin to the polo grounds in the host's "auto"; after this, tea on the country-club veranda, and another spin home. Another half-hour was now again given to the removal of dust, then an hour to an exceptionally well-served supper; more chatter, with rather high laughter; then the summoning of the original "auto"; good-byes, some waving of hands, a little preliminary chugging of the machine; then a speeding away, a vanished thing. Gone in a flash! A clean sheet once more! The moving-picture visit was over; the host and hostess returned to the chairs on their own veranda; the handsome, long-legged

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bronzed children looked bored; and the *lares* and *penates* inside, if there were any, shivered, I am sure, with what "freezings" in the midst of "old December's bareness everywhere."

"And yet this time removed was summer's time." There were in that flashing speeding automobile six people: there was an old gentleman (very trig and alert) who had hunted tigers in India and had buried three wives; there was a woman who was one of the most proud and vain women in the world, as well as one of the most beautiful; there was a man who had carried through a great panic in Wall Street, and who wore an invisible halo of prayers of widows and orphans; there was a middle-aged woman with a broken heart, whose lover had been buried at sea; there was a fresh-looking young girl chained to the rock of modern conventions, and a square-jawed handsome young Perseus, who was in love with her and determined to rescue her and carry her away to dwell with poverty and himself on a claim in eastern Idaho.

Flash, flash! They are moving pictures, they are gone! What might they not have been, what might they not have contributed,

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very especially to the host's children, in the way of lessons and knowledge and education, had they remained long enough to be guests! What? Education? But the children all go to school, and to the best to be had; and the little one there is just starting in under the Montessori method. You should see how amazingly, from fifty-seven varieties, she can select and grade the different shades and colors.

Madame Montessori recommends that children be under the care of a "directress" (note the name) in the "Houses of Childhood," each day, the day to begin at eight and to last until six, in a schoolroom where the Montessori "method" is practised by means, mainly, of the "didactic material"! The thing revolts me. I do not say, "What time for arithmetic and geography, and the sterner realities of schooling?" No, nor do I complain as does Sir Walter Scott when he touches on Waverley's education, you remember, that "the history of England is now reduced to a game at cards." I say to myself more solemnly, "But what time is left for life? What time for guests?"

They have a great care of children's edu-

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cation nowadays. We were neglected to a higher learning and abandoned to a larger fate. There were guests coming! We made off to don our best dresses and behaviors. We hoped to be worthy the gracious occasion. We meant to try. Life was at the door.

It was not mere shrewdness in St. Paul, surely, when he recommended the Romans so earnestly to be "given to hospitality"; but a wistfulness as well, and a certain longing for a high education to be given unto them; and it was his correspondents' welfare he had in mind, you remember, rather than the welfare of their guests, when he bade the Hebrews that they "be not forgetful to entertain strangers"; for — now note carefully the sequel — "for thereby some have entertained angels un-
aware."

I have an old friend who is on his way, I am told by those in authority, to be one of our great modern psychologists. He gives anxious thought to the education of his children. Lately, he approached me seriously in the matter of his boy's educational needs. Would I talk them over with him? He wished to consult me. I looked for a careful discussion of

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"methods," and was ready with all my arguments concerning the Montessori teachings. Instead, he inquired, "Now when will you come and visit us? a real visit, I mean? That is what I wanted to ask you. It is with that that I am most concerned. That is exactly what Jack needs."

I am needed as a guest in their house, for the sake of the children! My heart rises at the thought! Cheered, I seem to see ahead, clearly, a time when, if we do not provide them with guests, we shall think that we have shamefully neglected our children's education; when we will no more deny them visitors, than we would now neglect to have them taught to read.

To love life for ourselves and others; to be forever interested in it; to be loyal to it, and that down to the grave; to dwell helpfully and appreciatively with one's kind; to understand others as generously as is possible to faulty human nature, and to make ourselves understood as much as is consistent with courtesy; these are, I take it, the fine flower of culture; here is all that I would dare call education, or presume to think of permanent importance.

And by no means, I feel sure, can youth be

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led to all this so readily, so happily, so effectually, as by means of the age-old virtue of hospitality. These things are things which guests bring with them, knowing it not, and bestow on those who are not aware of the bestowal.

And our most advanced ideal, that of "universal brotherhood" and a "federation of the world" — what is this, I ask you, but a glad sharing of life in a society to which all will be welcome, with bread and wine and greeting denied to none, and guest and host fulfilling an equal obligation?

This is the old manner of entertaining, and — I ask your patience — it is God's manner, not less. The gentle sympathy, the unfailing hospitality of my mother, — how gentle and understanding she was of all types which frequented the old house! — her patience and hospitality had in them, I like to think, some resemblance to that larger patience of Him in whose House of Life we do but for a time visit, some of us how gayly, how romantically, some how fretfully and inconsiderately, lingering past our time; some contributing but idle gossip; some lending to the hearth-fires the

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glow of poetic dreams; some adding truth or dignity of our own; some possessed of foibles and accomplished in failures; some shining with hopes of final successes that shall never be ours. Yet all of us, by the grace of God, and God be thanked, even so, adding somewhat to the meaning of life, edifying when we least know it, teaching when we are wholly unaware; helpful, instructive, even in our blunders, profiting others by the often profitless lessons and fables of our lives; enlightening when we are most ignorant of so doing, and even when our own lives are darkened. In a word, *guests*; and what is of even sweeter import, all of us understood, condoned, valued, pitied, loved, by the Master of the House; welcomed by his world that has long looked for our coming; served by his servants; waited upon by wind and wave and those others who do his bidding; afforded the bread of life to eat, given the wine of life to drink; warmed by the shining, welcoming sun; lighted by no less candles than the stars; and with rest and peace, and a bed at last for every one.

THE DISAPPOINTMENTS AND VICISSITUDES OF MICE

I

THERE is, I am persuaded, a tendency in many of us to reckon too absorbedly our own difficulties and to give but scant regard to the difficulties of others. This I have observed frequently, not only in our associations with those of our own kind, but very especially in our relations with creatures that we assume to be of a lower order than ourselves.

I believe my own opportunity for observing the difficulties and disappointments of certain members of the animal kingdom to have been somewhat exceptional. It first came to me by way of residence in a very delightful house in the country, in which it was my privilege to live. It is an old house, as age goes in America, eighty or more years having passed over the oldest of its low gables. Before we came to it, the owner had not lived in it for many years. People had camped there from time to time; it had served during one summer as sanctuary

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to some episcopal nuns, who set up a chapel in one of its twenty-two rooms, and tinkled matins and vespers in and out of its twilit chambers; but they remained a short two months only and then went on again, they and their chanted services, leaving it voiceless and tenantless — tenantless, that is, as to human kind.

When we came to it there were many problems, difficult enough, certainly, to be met before the beautiful old rooms of pleasing and aristocratical proportions could be made comfortable and livable. But I know now that I reckoned these problems far too curiously, and with too scant regard for the far greater difficulties that our advent must have put upon all the shy creature-folk who had up to that time found the old place convenient and habitable enough.

In front of the house a wide brook brawls, or pauses in little pools, to meditate under the hazel light of the birches and maples of a most lovely woodland. Into this woodland the long veranda, running the length of the house, faces directly. It is but a step — say, rather, the mere dip of a wing — from the branches of the

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trees to the more sheltered safety of those cornices and crevices of pillar and window-frame where nests may be built so commodiously, away from storm and uncertainty of many kinds; so, too, it is but a step, or let us say a mere flying-squirrel-leap, from the drooping wood branches to the mossy veranda roof, and thence a swift squirrel-run, of no distance at all, along the varied eaves, and under them where secret openings offer, and then but a flash of four-footed speed, to the inviting safety and quiet of the old rafter attic — an ideal place to raise baby squirrels.

When we arrived that day, the house was occupied, at its edges and corners, and even between its closed attic shutters, by birds of every householding and house-loving variety; and in between its many walls, and in its upper rooms and closets and air-chambers and low, long attic, by squirrels and chipmunks; and here, there, and everywhere, as we learned later, in all manner of unobservable but plainly audible places, by mice.

At the time I was not aware of the completeness of this occupancy; but looking back now with full knowledge, I have a sense of shame

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and crudeness as I think what our coming must have meant to all those many denizens of that long, rambling, quiet old mansion. I had then, it must be remembered, not a thought of them. We were reckoning so absorbedly all our own difficulties and discomforts of moving attendant on our arrival, that we gave not so much as a thought to their calamities of withdrawal.

The birds were the first to go. I remember the frightened dart of one of them close to my face when I first stepped from the front hall on to the veranda. Such a frightened whirr and clipping and cutting of the air to get through it and away, as if a panic had seized her. And another on the branches just beyond the veranda, on her way, no doubt, back to her nest on the window-casing, where now she dared not alight. Such incredulous flitting from branch to branch, such twitching of tail and wings, such anxious twitterings and turnings of the head, such bird exclamations! Then she spread her wings and flew away, no doubt to circulate the news. What Huns and Vandals had entered on her possessions and threatened the country of her safety!

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I think the first week, certainly the second, at most, saw all the birds gone. The squirrels and chipmunks, too, though they stayed on a trifle later, were not long in departing. There were councils and hurried scamperings, hushed pauses, and now and then — when I got an actual glimpse of one of them — an attitude of intent listening, a tiny paw held dangling in front of a visibly beating heart; then the quick, noiseless drop to all-fours, the drooped tail, the flash of speed; then the leap into leafy invisibility — only the branches left swaying, remembering.

We had an Irish cook, who called all this tribe — red squirrels, gray squirrels, and chipmunks, — indiscriminately “the munks.”

“God bless us! Look at the munks, mum! How they do race and carry on!”

She came to me the second morning, after what I take to have been a sleepless night. “Did you hear last night, mum? ’Twas a shame to any decent house. And but for its bein’ here in this heathen country, at the back of God’s field, and not a Christian locomotive to be had for miles, I’d pack up and be gone before I’d stand another night of their riotin’!

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I can't stand the rakish things, mum." The last in a high, nervous key.

"What is it you cannot stand?"

"The munks, mum!"

It was she, a devout daughter of the Church, who had said it. I made no amendment; I only, I am sorry to say, offered her as consolation this: —

"Don't worry about them. They will not stay now we are here. They will find other homes for themselves."

Yes, I said just that, and gave it to her for consolation.

II

So much for the birds and squirrels, those altogether shy denizens given to quick abdication. But the mice, being, I suppose, of a somewhat more reasoning and philosophical order, more given to treaty and capitulation, remained, after I know not what cautious considerations and watchful consultations among themselves. That these must have been sufficiently serious, I am convinced, for we heard at first very little indeed of their doings; as if they intended to wait and study this

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phenomenon of our usurpation before taking any risk with powers so unlikely and unknown.

But as time passed, their attitude toward the heavens and their horoscope must have altered. Doubtless there was some hope that matters were not so bad as the old and experienced among them had prophesied. Appropriately quiet in the day, in the night they began to dare, and to recover what was, I suppose, some of their erstwhile freedom, or old-time happiness. They began cautiously to come and go; to advance creepingly; to explore; to inquire and pry; to examine and study; and I think, no doubt, to report.

The usurpers, it seems, had a strange way of lying quiet at night (of all times!), and pursuing their busy activities in the day, when all good mouse citizens were in bed and asleep! Well, so far so good. Perhaps the mice set this down to a special providence. However that may be, it is certain that they acted on the intelligence; for at night, having now become well informed as to our habits, they began to come and go, if still a little cautiously, yet with more and more freedom.

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I used to lie awake listening to them. One would scurry across the floor wildly overhead, forget something, and run back for it. Another, carrying a burden, would in fright or haste drop it, scamper away as if terrified (oh, good gracious!) and then would dare to go back for it, and roll it away soundingly into safety. I am inclined to think that a certain pleasure was attendant on these dangers, and that among them, as among ourselves, the brave were the gay; for there were among them now — oh, bead-eyed, venturesome spirits! — certain delicate squeakings that had all the effect of laughter. I could have sworn their feet tittered; there was — I do assure you I am speaking the truth — something giggling in their gait.

They were not, I am sure, without their Colchases and Cassandras; but, despite these, they began ere long to have certain celebrations. Go to! Let old White-Whiskers, who foretold calamity, take himself off and lie with his nose on his paws! There are better things in the world than prudence!

Celebrations there certainly were, though of what exact kind I am unable to state; wed-

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dings, very likely; town meetings, it may be, with the ladies present and welcome; picnics, in all probability; and christenings, I lean to believe, at which I make little doubt they drank deliriously of dandelion wine. One must not demand too curiously where they got it. I really have no idea. I keep my own well corked. I only know that circumstantial evidence is strongly in favor of the belief that they had it, and that in large quantities. How else is it conceivable they could so far forget our presence and their own risk? For I heard them coming home late one night between the rafters, shortly before dawn, in an openly riotous manner. Prudence they had flung to the winds. Their behavior was wholly ramshackle and reckless. Such squeakings! such tumblings and titterings and scramblings as could only have occurred among those totally oblivious to all danger! Such a drunken dropping of acorns and other picnic viands! with little shrieks from the ladies! Too evidently they had determined to eat and drink and be merry, let come what would.

I could not help laughing myself with them, yet I sobered, too, at such recklessness on their

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part. This was no mere indiscretion; it was sheer folly.

I have no way of knowing whether any Daniel rose to warn them. If so, he was not heeded. The feast went on uninterrupted. Or, it is possible, too, they had not the requisite education or conscience to enable them to read the moonlight on the rafter wall for writing of an ominous character.

When I wakened in the morning, not a sound or evidence. Like Bottom, it seemed to me that I had had a most rare vision, for daylight had laid a hushing and dispersing hand on them also. Then, suddenly, I knew it all for reality. Not a beady eye among them, of course, that was not closed now; in the daytime twilight of old rafters, all of them, without doubt, slept, dandelion deep, their noses and their whiskers on their tails.

Meanwhile, time and events went forward. Miss Layng, a North-of-Ireland woman who kept house for us, while I attended to the work required of me in my study, appeared before me with a white and sleepless face.

Miss Layng had ominous colored hair, which she heaped each morning in an exact manner

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above a face in which delicate health, gentleness, and unalterable determination were composite. She stood before me now, like an allegorical figure of Justice, or Commerce, or Law, bearing in one outheld hand a magenta "Dutchman's head" cheese.

"You heard them?"

She spoke with quiet severity.

I looked inquiring, innocent.

She disregarded this, as a person too much above a lie herself to recognize one.

"I think we shall need six traps, at least. Cook says she will not stay unless they go. She says one ran across her face last night!"

(Oh, the riotousness of them! More than I had suspected!)

At this moment the cook herself appeared, far less allegorical, comfortingly real, a lemon-squeezer in one hand.

"Oh, mum, I can't be saying exactly whether it did or not. Maybe it did, belike it did n't. But they do get me that nervous with what they *might* do!"

"You can see from this," antiphonied Miss Layng, solemnly.

She turned the Holland cheese toward me.

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In its side was eaten what could only be called a cavern. She stood there exhibiting it, eloquent, without need of words.

Meanwhile, my own mental processes were busy, delightedly. Of course! of course! Here was a revelation and an accounting! It was this, undoubtedly, that had been the occasion of so much merriment and wild celebration. And how altogether natural! For days they had been fearful, and oppressed with dark anxiety. What harm might not such a race as ourselves bring them! Other powers had fled before us. They had remained! But who dared tell the outcome? Dark prophecies! Sombre forebodings! Unthinkable possibilities! And then, — then, — when the dark-minded and old among them pointed out optimism as the sheerest folly, — then came this proof of unlooked-for benevolence! Age and pessimism received their due. Caution and timorousness were flung to the winds. Old wives and grandfathers were flouted, and their cautiousness set down to sheer envy and crabbedness. The day and the victory were in the hands of the young, the optimistic, the full of faith! Come, ladies; come gentlemen! Pay no heed to

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these pessimistic aged people. Preserve your faith in life! Here is good warrant! Quick! uncork the bottles! Bring the baskets along! This is a day for feasting, for feasting! Look upon this magenta miracle of benevolence, and be convinced. Life is kind!

Where is a man with heart and imagination so dead who would not understand, by the light of all this, why the night had seen such celebration? How well understood, now, was the daring of the gentlemen, the almost hysterical gayety of the ladies!

Meanwhile Miss Layng waited.

"I thought I would get six traps, but wished to speak of it first, otherwise you might wonder to see so many on the bill at the end of the month."

In this cryptic yet crystalline fashion the problem of their fate was presented to me. There was put before me a choice, a clear choice, between the proper maintaining of an honorable household, the retaining of a house-keeper and a cook with all that this implied as to my own comfort, and — a whole community of I know not how many fathers, mothers, children, step-children, brothers,

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half-brothers, uncles, aunts, cousins, first cousins once removed, prophets, sibyls, lawgivers.

Need I say which I felt constrained to choose?

Six were caught the first night.

III

Six the first night! In the very midst of their rejoicings and the apparent favor of their divinity — six! What a subject for a rodent Æschylus! How they must have set themselves to ponder it! How and by what neglect or unintentional disrespect had they offended the gods, who but a while before had shone so kind! Six! And, as in the reapings of war among ourselves, these were bound to have been the best and most adventurous spirits. I paused to look at only one of them. What a sleek and likely fellow he was! What a bead of an eye! What a father of a family he would have made, nay, perhaps was!

After that I asked Miss Layng to spare me all bulletins and statistics; but by the frequency with which I came across her in the halls, or just emerging from closets, holding far from her, between horrified fingers, a small

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magenta trap rigged with wires and a dangling tail, I knew the number was large.

I knew, too, by signs other and quite as authentic. The riotous junketings had indeed ceased. The community was without doubt sobered, and, it may be, led to think of its sins, its gods having turned against it. There was less frolic and gladness in the world than there had been.

I confess, all this seemed to me a loss, or, more exactly, a kind of waste. The wiser and the brooding East does not throw such things away. Are there not many folk in India, of tawny skin and gentle eye, who regard the humbler orders as sacred? There in that land are not the monkeys (and I cannot believe them to be a less destructive or garrulous race) welcome to the temples? There does not Kim's sacred bull go about and select the best vegetables for himself?

I was discontent with our order of things, not to say conscience-stricken, and thought much about it. How we patronize and humiliate and rout and exterminate these humbler folk! With how marked an arrogance we deal with them! How we impose our morals upon

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them, and bid them live up to our laws or be gone! They must exist in the presence of a perpetual ultimatum. No court is held for their benefit. There is no appeal possible save to mouse-traps with their inevitable death-penalty. There is no more chance of getting their case correctly stated before us than before the White Queen. Who ever listened to even their most able and eloquent attorney?

"My lords," he begins, with nervous whisks, "the case of my client is one that especially commends itself to human clemency. Six little ones at home, my lords, and not a mouthful to eat! If this, my lords, if this be not —"

"Off with his head! Sentence first" (the inevitable sentence!), "verdict afterward!"

So we behave ourselves atrociously toward these, who, though of a humbler order, are yet susceptible, I doubt not, of sensibilities and sorrows and enjoyments; we, who in turn are so ready to abuse our own order for their atrocities when we do not happen to be a party to them.

These things are disturbing to philosophy and troubling to the heart. How shall we with a conscience justify ourselves in the eyes of the

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animal creation? Humbler folk than ourselves, yet I cannot think that mice suffer by a comparison. I have attended to them with much speculative attention, and I have found them a peaceable people without malice. The worst offense that I have to record against them is the demolition of several fine books in my library; but it was done (it is not fair to hide this testimony) with the high intent of providing a comfortable nest for the birth and early tending of the tender young. As much cannot be said for the destruction of Louvain, for the shelling of Rheims. They have purloined my cheese and been sly as to my soap and tallow candles, but not, you will note, that they might grow disproportionately fat and sleek thereon; no, nor for the sake of banking these riches, to exchange them later for horseless carriages in which to loll lazily or to pursue madly some unwholesome excitement; no, nor yet to lay such things by in hoard and stores in such a manner as to make it difficult or impossible for others to have the same pleasure as themselves. No; they took only what hunger rendered legitimate, a few satisfying nibbles at the candle, then leaving it

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free, with a fine democracy, for the next man to take whatever was his need.

Where shall you find me a millionaire, or even a moderately conscientious business man among us, with as generous and as democratic a tendency? We who are so sharp with them, so eager to give them the death-penalty, would we have thieved as little as they? Nor have I ever, for all my listenings, been able to hear any quarrelings or recriminations among them. Solicitous cautions, dangerous adventure, frolickings and gigglings and squeaking laughter I have heard, but nothing to compare with our harshnesses, spoken and unspoken; nor do I believe them capable either of our sullenness or our spites. I have met, as have most of us, with days of such from honorable men and women, which I do not believe a mouse — of a so much lower order! — would for a moment be capable of.

In the face of uncertainties and disappointments such as theirs, what would become, I wonder, of our philosophy? Yet they would appear to maintain their gentleness unspoiled. We who take offense so readily; we who would boast if we forgave a man seven times seven!

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They, it would appear from easily collected data, do, in all likelihood, forgive seven hundred times seventy, and make no ado about it at all. They seem always ready to try life anew, and to give you another chance to be generous.

I was sitting once in the library of the old house, of which I have written, reading. Stillness and the stars were out; a fire burned on the hearth, for the night was cold. I read by the light of a lamp a book that I loved. At my feet slept Commodore, my collie, his pointed nose resting on his paws. On the rug by the fire was the old tortoise-shell cat, Lady Jane, a spoiled but endeared companion. Both had had their supper so bounteously that the dish of milk lay unemptied still on the hearth, and, like the Giant in the fairy tale, they slept "from repletion."

They slept and I read, and for comfort of mind and body you might have gone far to find three so comfortable as we that night. And then presently I became aware of a little timorous shadow, that was not a shadow, after all, but a tiny, tiny mouse. It put up its nose and sniffed the air nor'-nor'-west, sou'-sou'-east. It tasted the possible danger with

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its whiskers. It tasted and made sure, delicately, like a connoisseur. Could the great adventure be risked?

I can give you no idea by what sensitive soundings and testings and deliberations and speculations it at last crept into the flickering firelight. I wish I could convey to you the delicacy of its behavior: manners to make those of Commodore and Lady Jane (they with their sounding titles!) seem crude and greedy and plebeian. Its little pauses said, "May I?" Its delicate deliberations conveyed, "If I am troubling no one?" Its hesitations offered, "If I may be so bold?" And then, after these preliminaries, it took its place how politely on the brim of the flat dish of milk, and drank, and raised its head, and drank, paused and drank again, daintily. Once, I thought, it offered a courteous toast to me and my silence.

Commodore and Lady Jane slept on! Oh, if they had known! Oh, the mews of disappointment and the terrible barkings and the *Fi-fo-fum* there would have been! But no, they slept on; and at last, having supped but lightly, the little mouse took itself away, car-

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rying with it neither money-bags nor marvelous hen, nor golden harp. A true story and a fairy tale all in one, if you like — and without the questionable ethics of its more famous prototype.

IV

What do they make of life? Their stoicism, their gentleness, their never-jaded curiosity perpetually tempt my speculation. That they are a people of vicissitudes and disappointments due largely to ourselves needs no arguing. What opinions have they of us? What effect have our behaviors on them? A consistently gentle people, they are treated with unvarying severity. What have they in lieu of logic to make life bearable? And what reward is there for their virtues? Or, are they too simple at heart, as yet, to ask for reward at all beyond the hope of a mere precarious existence? Is life as dear to them as that? And what, if any, in the way of religious speculation of a crude and early order, might they be supposed to entertain? I would like to be delegated to investigate and report upon mouse mythology.

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I can hardly rid myself of the idea that in their present is, as it were, some dim glimmering of our own past. They seem to me testing the world, as we ourselves must have done when we too were less established, when we also were in a position scarcely less precarious, eons before any written records were kept, long before man had learned to remember at will for the quick purposes of convenience and comparison — in a dim, dim foretime, when to us, in some early Caliban existence, the outward world was as Prospero, unaccountable, and possessed of strange whimsies and quick with unwarrantable revenges.

"When a tree," says Frazer, tracing in his "Golden Bough" the beginnings of mythology, "comes to be viewed no longer as a body of the tree spirit, but simply as its abode, which it can quit at pleasure, an important advance has been made in religious thought. Animism is passing into polytheism."

I cannot help wondering from time to time, whimsically, whether those quiet denizens of that old house had made "an important advance in religious thought"; was "animism," with them, "passing into polytheism"? Were

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mouse-traps deceptive and evil gods with terrible snapping jaws, or but the abodes of these evil deities? And for philosophy and metaphysic, what had they? In that dim attic world was this perhaps an entire people in its mythopœic age, their gods descending and ascending miraculously, leaving a magenta cheese as incontrovertible evidence, or as unaccountably visiting them with swift and crafty destruction?

I am inclined to think their world is a colored one, fertile in fables. It would not surprise me to find that a small wooden object, known to us of a different development as a mere "mouse-trap," is to them some Dis or Ahriman, a terrible deity of dark powers and multiple personalities. That there are other gods besides, — the great and awful CAT, the less omnipresent but not less terrible TERRIER, — I am not disposed to doubt; nor do I think they lack the shining ones also, as quiet as the others are full of movement, as conducive to life and well-being as the others to death and destruction — bright, effulgent ones of the godlike color of cheese, or silver sheen of tallow and paraffine; and back of all

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these, it may be, some elder deities, — ourselves, — the older gods with Olympian powers, who can establish earthquakes; who can wipe away entire communities; gods and goddesses whose heads are in the clouds, whose movements are terrific, who shake complete creation when they walk, and with unthinkable besoms sweep with horrible sweepings, and periodically visit the world with awful scourges and hellish visitations of order and cleanliness.

I would not pretend to be acquainted with mouse literature, but I would venture a wager that their "Arabian Nights" outdoes ours as cheese, chalk. Djinns, genii, and affrites — can it be thought that they lack them? If the unaccountability of the world be, as it would seem to me, the basis of all literature and the origin of all fable, philosophy, entertainment, and speculation, can it be denied that they have extraordinary inducement? If our own world seems full of chance, and forever breaking away from bonds and probabilities, I only ask you to compare it with theirs! — in which the unaccountable is the sole certainty they possess.

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I awoke one morning in the late fall, and began to dress, giving no thought whatever to them and their problems. When I came to put on my shoe, however, I could no longer ignore them. In the toe of it, stowed away safely, were three hickory-nuts!

Some sleek-coated citizen, with a winter house in mind, had wandered in those pur-
lieus, thinking to begin the arduous labor requisite to the building of a home suitable to the long, dark season nearly at hand, when lo, this prudent necessity was suddenly, by a miraculous bounty, waived! Mark you and observe! Here was provided for him a home such as his best skill could never have contrived. A place how warm, how neat, how conformable! That his acceptance was immediate, was testified by his already accumulated stores.

I paused and took them in my hand: one, two, three. There was a saint, I am told, who allowed the birds to build in his two palms, and did not rise from his knees until the fledglings were ready to fly from the nest. Neither was I a saint, nor could I afford such beneficence. I was pressed for time, as God's

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saints, I believe, never are, and I needed my shoe. I slipped it on as I had slipped on its mate; I tied its lace neatly, gave the bow an efficient pat, and walked away in it. It is true, I did put the three hickory-nuts on the bureau. I am not sure what I meant to do with them, but I never saw them again. Miss Layng, the terrible goddess of order, probably flung them out of the window with mutterings.

But I ask you only to picture the romance, and it may be the terror, of the thing to the one who had laid such delightful plans, who had enjoyed such anticipations! House, stores, hopes, social aggrandizement, everything—gone! carried off entire, by God knows what spirit! and not so much as a vestige left to tell the tale!

I do not forget that it is the custom to speak of mice as *destructive*; yet may not that word be used, after all, with something of a bias? I picture one of them on his way to seek a few bits of newspaper for the lining of a nest, and I imagine him suddenly endowed with the ability to read the inky characters. He pauses in amaze. His eyes bulge and devour the news

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beadily. And what news it is! Statistics! Staggering statistics of the men and officers killed since our great war's beginning; and of aged and innocent citizens shot, women violated, little children sacrificed, noble cities destroyed!

His hand goes over his heart to quiet its violent beating. Ah, what a race of gods they are! Or, he reads this from a recent account of the bayonet practice at Plattsburg — whatever "bayonet" may mean, and whatever "Plattsburg"; for these accessories of civilization lie ahead of him some eons.

"Aim for the vitals," he reads. "Do not fire until you feel your bayonet stick. Thus you will shatter the bone, and you can then withdraw the blade. At the same time, try to trip your enemy with your left foot, so that he will fall forward."

None of this is clear to him. This is the deportment, without doubt, of the immortal gods! Fancy the consequences of *his* attempting to trip *his* enemy, the mouse-trap, or the cat, or the terrier, with *his* left foot!

No; these are powers and potencies to which he can only look forward in dim futures, when

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the mouse tribe shall have attained, eons hence, perhaps, to a higher order of being, and to these godlike practices. But that, however glorious, is but a far dream! Meek and gentle and forgiving, in his inferiority, he lends himself devotedly once more to his labors, and nibbles the newspaper, carrying off small pieces of it, very destructively, to build that near-by nest in which soon are to be born tiny creatures as gentle and inferior and destructive as himself.

To one who has studied mythology with a reverence for its revelations, it must often have seemed that man is kinder than his conception of the mighty powers that try him. Job would seem to be, rather than the Deity, the hero of Job's tragical story; and how much nobler, to cite a most obvious instance, is the ancient Greek than his deities!

However impious this may appear to the pious, yet to me the thing looks hopeful. Dread and powerful as are our own gods, — Authority, Mammon, Sentiment, Public Opinion, Superstition, Fear, — and many as have been our sacrifices offered up to them, yet may it not be that humanity, frail, and so largely

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at their mercy, retains some sovereign nobilities still unvanquished by them?

Have we not had our own disappointments and vicissitudes? Have not our conceptions of our duties and privileges and rights and gayeties been but poorly adjusted to those powers whose awful retributions we have tempted? Yet I am inclined to hope that, notwithstanding all this, we shall still preserve some gentleness that cannot be conquered; shall still retain some virtues which, let these terrible powers descend upon us as they will, cannot be obliterated, that we shall be, till the end, something better than our fate, something more kind than our destiny.

I have but speculated widely concerning mouse mythology. Truth compels me to state that it is to me, after all, but dim and debatable territory. I can give you nothing authoritative as to their philosophy. But this I know: they have maintained their gentleness, and are a reproach to those whom I take to be their gods.

All else is but speculation and possibility, but this is the evidence of their lives. They are a meek and a forgiving people. Think

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only what they endure at our hands, who justly make so great a matter of a Belgium violated, and forget, in a god-like manner, when it so pleases us, a violated Congo, or a divided Persia, or a Poland outraged and cut to pieces, but not defended! How gentle, how consistent, how without spite, ill-will, or grudge, they remain toward those unalterably hostile to them! With what mildness not matched among us do they conduct themselves! How they preserve their cheerfulness, their good nature, their kindliness! Have you not heard with what gayety they roll hickory-nuts away? Has your ear not witnessed their gigglings and rejoicings?

But their virtues go deeper than this. It may be told of them above all, that, however provident in other matters, they store up no malice, they preserve no hate.

Once I lay ill in that house of which I have here written. I had been very wretched, but my physician, seated now by my bed, promised me I would soon be well. After that we spoke together, as we were wont to do, of matters of a philosophic kind, then paused. At the bottom of my bed, on the footboard, was a tiny

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mouse. No; it was not the same adventurous spirit who had visited the giant's castle and drunk from the plate of milk; this one was smaller and more slender. We did not speak. He came down cautiously, very gently, to the coverlet, then delicately up one fold, down another, pausing, listening, waiting to take note; pausing, waiting, foot delicately lifted, until he had got as far as the tray. He went very carefully about this, smelling and inspecting it; yes, I would have sworn, inspecting. It had every air of his wanting to know whether they had brought me the right and well-cooked food. He tasted nothing save a tiny crumb on the tray itself, and then, as though satisfied, was gone.

I hoped for another visit, but waited for him in vain. He was a little fellow, sleek of skin, with a black, beady eye, and very delicate whiskers. I never saw a daintier foot.

BIRTHDAYS AND OTHER EGOTISMS

I

CHARLES LAMB, in his "Grace Before Meat," protests — very endearingly, it seems to me — against the custom of particular thankfulness for food. He suspects that it had its origin in the "hunter state of man, when dinners were precarious things, and a full meal was something more than a common blessing; when a bellyful was a windfall and looked like a special Providence. — "It is not otherwise easy to be understood," he avers, "why the blessing of food — the act of eating — should have had a particular expression of thanksgiving annexed to it, distinct from that implied and silent gratitude with which we are expected to enter upon the enjoyment of the many other various gifts and good things of existence."

I find myself like-minded and similarly protestant as to birthdays. I cannot discover why the blessing of these should be hailed with any very particular delight, distinct from that

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implied joy with which we might be expected to welcome the many other various days of the year.

It cannot be said that it was because I was abnormally shy throughout my childhood that I found birthdays embarrassing, for I had no more than the usual shyness of the average child. Moreover, my surroundings and training gave me easy confidence in others and in myself. The tragedies of my little girlhood were not exceptional: dead cats or canaries, broken dolls, the inability to make myself always understood by grown-ups, and certain moral and spiritual failures and cataclysms known only to myself and what I took to be my fearfully disappointed Maker. But barring these things, incident and customary, my early years may be said to have been especially bright and reassuring. What was it, then, which could have caused this early distrust of birthdays?

If I am to trace the growth of what perhaps seems so unwarranted a thing, I shall have to ask indulgence for what may appear to be some of that very egotism I decry: I shall have to ask to be allowed a discussion of several of

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my own birthdays, and their celebration when I was a child.

My fifth is the earliest that I remember. I had been promised a cake with candles. Moreover, I had learned, by dint of the patience of Mademoiselle Cinque, our queer old French governess, a little French song, which I was to sing as my own share toward the festive celebration. From the shelter of my father's arm, I was to sing it for the rest to hear: —

*"Frè-re Jac-ques! Frè-re Jac-ques!
Dor-mez vous? Dor-mez vous?
Son-nez les matines; son-nez les matines;
Den, din, don!"*

The cake, then, and the song were, from my point of view, the extraordinarily important and sufficient events of the day — these and the fact that on that day I would be five years old. It is certain that I chattered about these things a great deal, and laid deep plans. But, as it happened, it was neither the cake nor yet my ripe years that were to make that day so memorable. I can close my eyes and go back to it unerring, and find myself in the old surroundings, familiar yet strange — strange that day with an unwonted, unac-

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countable strangeness. Where was everybody? The house was, indeed, still — as still as the February day outside, which lay quiet as death under a sheeted whiteness that had been drawn over it silently in the night.

I can seem to feel myself actually as little as I was then, and with my doll under one arm going up the silent stairs, laboriously but determinedly, pulling one leg resolutely after the other, up the length of them, with the aid of one hand on the banister spindles, to investigate for myself the strangeness.

An older sister of mine, whom I loved dearly, had been ill, and for several days past I had been cautioned to gentleness and had played apart, so that quietness of a certain kind I understood. But the quietness now was of a different order. In the upper hall some one opened a door, at the patter of my investigating steps, I suppose; held out a hand, stopped me in mid-search — stopped me and kissed me and told me. My sister had died in the early hours of that day, before the dawn was come.

I do not remember who it was who told me. I remember, however, pushing myself

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away from the embrace a little, demanding whether I might see my mother. I was told with great gentleness that this was impossible. My father? No; him, also, I might not see — not yet. All this sobered and puzzled me. I reached for the next, and perhaps on that day even dearer, possibility. Might I see the cook? Yes.

That, for a time at least, righted matters, and restored my world to me. I pattered down the stairs, down the lower hall, then more steps; found the cook and demanded my birthday cake; and in place of the cake received a most shocked look, delivered in the manner of unthinkable rebuke. When I insisted, words came to her tongue, but not concerning the cake. They dealt wholly with myself. They conveyed the impression that I had done some dreadful and wicked thing. They did not explain. I was expected to understand and repent.

I remember feeling only thoroughly outraged at having my reasonable request received in that manner. This was *my* day, and, in honor of it, there was to have been a birthday cake. As to larger matters, they were extraneous to the subject. Of death, it should

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be remembered, I had absolutely no knowledge. I loved my sister to the full bent of my simple but ardent little nature, and she had been peculiarly devoted to me; but ask some one who has never seen the stars or spoken with one who has seen them, what he knows of the deep firmament: so much I knew of that night which had fallen upon our house — nothing!

What I did know presently — the information being conveyed to me in unmistakable terms by the cook — was that my birthday celebration was not to be; that it was not only jeopardized, it was clean wiped out, by an event of immensely greater moment. I have little doubt I wept sufficiently over my personal disappointment, and it may have taken especial tact on the part of the gentle person upstairs to pacify me; but by and by, with that easy forgetfulness which is the better part of childhood, I must have relinquished all hope of appropriating that day as my birthday, and accepted, in place of it, life as it was.

My parents, who twice before had been summoned to bear acute loss, — once when, before I was born, a little baby brother of mine died, and once when the life of a little baby

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sister had flickered out before the flame got well started, — tasted now of what must have been a far deeper bitterness. She who had gone now was their “extreme hope.”

She was twenty-one when she died, and within a few months of her graduation at the University. She was brilliant above any promise given by the rest of us. I remember her very clearly — her sensitive and beautiful face, her great delicacy of body, her ready, very gentle laugh, and her unfailing understanding of all a little child's desires and moods. She was exquisite, sensitive as a mimosa in a garden of sturdier growth. Above us all she seemed to stretch delicate and flowering branches, in which the wind moved more mysterious; and lovely winged and songful things, that we could never have hoped to harbor, seemed to have made their home in her. There was in her something rare and unlooked for (I do not exaggerate), like the sudden call of a thrush in the twilight, or delicate and darkling, as in starlight the song of the nightingale. She was the one reckoned to be most like my father, and by the generous, and, I think, even proud consent of all of us, was by him the most

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beloved. She was as devoted as Cordelia, and with lesser cause, bringing to the happiness and fullness of his life what Lear knew only in his desolation. Since I have grown into what is at least some slight realization of what her loss must have meant to my father, I cannot touch without a trembling of tears the memory of his taking me in his arms as he did, to look upon her as she lay, white and final, delicate and done with life, there in the still and shuttered room.

But, incredible though it seems to my present knowledge, I had then no feeling of sadness whatever. She might have slept. Nor did the days that followed lay heavy hands upon me. There was a quiet stir and hushed preparation toward what I did not know, and I was looked after by neighbors or relatives to the extent of believing that a certain pleasant distinction accrued to me. In all that followed, I know that I contributed no sadness, only a child's frank observation in the face of unusual behavior of its elders.

But to return to the birthday. It was a remarkable one, you see, linked with all these things, allied to such large sorrows — a sad

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one and disappointing enough, you will say, for a little child. Yet I did not find it so. I was, as I have told you, indignant as to the cake, and disappointed, no doubt, that there was no happy and devoted family now gathered to hear me sing my gay little song. But to offset these there was a kind of reassurance in the day which I find it difficult to describe very exactly. It was as if, at one and the same time, this were and were not my birthday. It was my day by the calendar, but in no other way. For a birthday is one whose dawn and sunset are one's very own, a day when one's importance is admitted very gladly by a certain intimate circle. But on no day of my life, I am sure, was I of so little importance as then — a very inconsiderable little person, playing alone in the sunshine and with my song unsung. Yet something in that day shines now across the years, as distant as a star, as silver, as satisfying. That something is not to be ascribed to any one mere incident: it was compounded, no doubt, of the best of every relationship which I felt that day for the first time. The extreme gentleness of the grown-up of whom I have told you was one element;

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for the rest, the companionship with my father in that strange still moment in the shuttered room; the wordless love given me by my mother, of a different sort from any she had given me before; the quietness, giving me an impression as of remote spaces never dreamed of before; and, over all, the sense of something strange and of a great dignity, as of presences that moved, dread, but not unkindly.

And the little song which I had practised so faithfully, and which I was to have sung! Little as I was, and without ever being told, I believe, as the day wore on, I must have had a dim realization of how inconsiderable it was in that house where Death had taken up Life's lute, and, brows bent above it, remembered the songs that Life had sung.

II

The birthdays that followed on this one were curiously unsatisfying, though they were celebrated appropriately enough, and with the fullest respect for my importance. The anticipation and approach of them, as nearly as I can remember, were clear joy. But the days, when they arrived, overwhelmed me unac-

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countably. There was something disproportionate in them, so that I was glad to escape from their too personal glory to the more comfortable commonplace of the impersonal. It was as if I guessed dimly, without being in the least aware, that this display in my honor had in it something almost a little cheap — an egotism (though I had not then so much as heard the word) which contrasted unfavorably with the large and gracious and forgetful ways of Life itself.

I believe my embarrassment, my wholly unanalyzed sense of disappointment and disproportion, may have been, on a very diminutive scale, something akin to that which I am sure Joshua must have experienced, — not, mind you, at the moment of his extraordinary and flattering command, — no, but afterwards, afterwards, in the disappointed watches of the night, when he must have reflected, with disappointed amazement, that, if his senses deceived him not, he, Joshua, had made the great luminary to stand still over Gibeon, and the moon in the valley of Ajalon. Something, too, of what Joseph must have experienced, — not in the enjoyable dream of

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his brothers' sheaves bowing down to his sheaf, and the sun and the moon and the eleven stars making their obeisance to him; nor in those long anticipatory years, when his greatness was approaching, and the scroll of the future hung loose in his hands for his remembering eye to read, — no, but in the actual moment of overwhelming fulfillment, when, from Judah to Benjamin, his brothers actually did bow down to him as ruler over all those great granaries of Egypt, and, as we are told, his mature spirit could not consent to endure so much, but “he sought where to weep, and entered into his chamber and wept there.”

These are, I believe, no mere extraneous or personal experiences, but are rather of the fine weave and fabric of humanity; and the uneasiness I felt in my complacent little soul, I now believe to have been a stirring of old things, of ancient memories under the moon, which linked my little inconsiderable life, as they link all lives, to Egypt, Nilus, Babylon, and the ages that are not.

But lest this seem but vague argument and debatable territory, I would like to speak of other childhood birthdays of my own which,

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it seems to me, bring to the case clear evidence and important testimony.

I have said that I was one of a large family. Happily we could not make too important a matter of birthdays in our home; it would have kept us celebrating most of the time, and would have tended to make the whole year frivolous. For obvious reasons, then, birthday parties were not many. But I remember one of a most lasting glory, which had as its excuse that one of my sisters was fifteen upon the fifteenth. My mother, who by mere warmth and gayety of sympathetic temperament was forever on the watch for a reason to celebrate something, could never have missed so valid an occasion. Furniture was therefore moved out, ferns were moved in, smilax was twined about the chandeliers and strung along the portraits, a linen dancing-cloth was stretched the length of the three rooms. I can still feel the smooth glide of my strapped slippers over it. Musicians were concealed in a bosky corner. At the top of the stairs was a room known as the conservatory, whose plants had been all winter in my keeping, their condition testifying rather sadly to that fact. But now, by a

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lovely bounty, my sins of negligence were all wiped out. Florists came bearing pots of flowers in full blossom, and more of them and more of them. There were primroses such as my own care could never have hoped for, and fuchsias and candytuft and daffodils in full abundant bloom, even while the March winds outside yet blew so chill. In the day or two just before the fifteenth, how often I ran up into that little room and stood wordless and satisfied among them, or stooped and touched my cheek to them! Oh, the sweet heliotrope! oh, the mignonette!

On that wonderful evening there bloomed among the flowers little lights with dark red shades, and here and there comfortable seats were placed, where you could hear the music at a muted distance. We children all wore new gowns, my sister — she of the birthday — having of course, by generous consent, the filmiest and the loveliest.

That was a happy gathering if ever I saw one; and were I brought to believe that a birthday celebration is ever an affair of un-mixed loveliness, I should perhaps be brought to say it concerning one for fifteen on the fif-

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teenth. Fourteen on the fourteenth lacks flavor, is a little unripe, like fruit imported before the real season is at hand. Sixteen on the sixteenth is a little over-mellow, a little late; already childhood is gone, and youth, however lovely it may be in the receiving of homage and favors, should already have its hands outstretched rather to bestow them. But fifteen on the fifteenth! There is a golden mean and a time for all things, as the Scriptures and the fairy tales tell us. This was the time to dance, that King Solomon talks about. Like the "Tuney Bear's" soup in the old tale, this party to celebrate fifteen on the fifteenth seems to me as nearly right as things can be contrived in a world of chance like our own.

Through a maze of years and smilax I am still aware of the delicious mystery of concealed music wailing forth the Sirens waltzes (no dances were given then without the Sirens waltzes). I can see the children moving about, gay and a little fluttery; and the grown-ups, quieter, but still gay, who came to add the dignity and charm of their greeting to the celebration; and I can see my sister, — fifteen that day by a delectable distinction, — lithe

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and poised and gracious, and flushed and very pretty, standing beside my mother, her eyes looking out like stars under her dark hair, and her flying eyebrows that had just the slight lift of a bird's wing; and my next younger sister and I, of a less vivid coloring, no more than attendant sisters, and rich enough in that, with our new sashes and our new delight in graciousness; and my oldest sister of all, moving about with a lovely homage to us younger ones, a gracious bending down of her life to ours for a little while.

And every one, old and young, even some with gray hairs, came and bowed over the hand of fifteen. That impressed me most. And some who were a little more than guests — intimates — brought my sister gifts — one that lies here now on the table as I write: a beautifully bound small copy of Shakespeare's Sonnets, with the Dowden introduction. I did not know it then for what it was. I only loved it for its red and gold binding; but later, I grew up to it in my girlhood, as a young vine climbs at last to a trellis that is placed above it and awaits its growing. On its first leaf, in an exact hand, is written the date, my sister's

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name, and that of the donor. Then follows this wish, suitable to the day: —

“May each succeeding birthday find you as light-hearted as you are to-day.”

Oh, time! time! that brings us our blunders and our tears! Was he so inexperienced himself, he who brought her that? Or did he set that down in a mere spirit of carnival and bravado, just because she *was* fifteen on the fifteenth, and nothing else was for the moment to be admitted of any importance?

I do not know how beautiful a birthday it was for her, but oh, for me! How I loved it! How good it was to bring her my homage! How glad and willing and eager I was that she should stand first! Play, play, concealed musicians! I can still catch the plucking of the harp-strings, and the sweet gay wailing of the violins, across the years.

III

One other birthday of my childhood stands out vividly in my memory: that one on which I was twelve years old. My mother had taken us all abroad, to widen our horizons and promote our education. After a preliminary few

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months in England, we were established in Paris, in a comfortable apartment in a little hotel which they tell me is still there, and which went then, and still goes, by the name "Louis le Grand" — nothing less.

From the moment of our arrival, in January, I began to think even more of my birthday than was my wont. This was, no doubt, largely due to the fact that, at the distance of a few blocks one way or another, anything in the world, so it seemed, could be bought. Shops! Shops! The rue des Petits Champs, the avenue de l'Opéra, the boulevard des Italiens, were full of them. The rue des Petits Champs had innumerable *boutiques* of all kinds — one given over to nothing, mind you, but honey and gingerbread, like a shop in a fairy tale. If you went across the Place Vendôme and followed the rue Castiglione, you came to the most romantic shops of all, there under the arcades of the rue de Rivoli, beginning with the most delectable pastry shop in the world on the very corner. You could walk there on a sunny day, disdainful of the weather, with the Gardens of the Tuileries opposite you, and feast your soul on the varied displays.

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But when all was said, there was nothing that could be compared with the shops of the rue de la Paix. Here you came at once into a richer atmosphere. Here, mainly, were jewel-shops, displaying tiaras and necklaces — “rings and things and fine array.” Dolls and gingerbread and honey were delightful — let me not seem to undervalue them; but to stand looking on while a master of his profession leaned over a velvet counter to show my mother brooches of jewels, and diamonds set in rings, was to know from the standpoint of childhood some of the true elevations of life.

While my mother considered jewels set thus or so, my eyes roved, speculative, among the rich wares. I had been brought up in too old-fashioned a way to make any mistake as to my limitations. Well-bred children, it was understood, wore neither rings nor ornaments, unless one or two of a most positive simplicity. But watches there were, a bewildering variety — for we were in the shop of one Victor Fleury, who, among other distinctions that I doubt not he had, was “Horloger de la Marine.” You can imagine whether he had watches! I called my mother’s attention to

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the beauty of them, some very small ones in particular. She looked at them, but made no comment. I deduced that it was not well-bred for a little girl of twelve to wear a watch.

My birthday dawned at last. I was kissed and wished many happy returns, and was told that there was to be a dinner that night especially for me, and that I would then receive my gifts. The hotel was a small one. Dinner would be served for the hotel guests a trifle earlier, so that they might the sooner leave the way clear for me. This had been proposed by Madame Blet herself, the proprietress, and was intended no doubt for a fine piece of hospitality. For me the strict hotel rules were to be slackened; the fine democracy of hotel life, where one guest is as good as another, if he but pay his account, was to be overruled in my favor; for me the sun was to be advanced, and the moon set at a new pace in the heavens!

It was very grand in anticipation, I can assure you. To be twelve was of itself no inconsiderable glory, but to be twelve under such flattering conditions! I resolved to write an account of all this to my two chums in Amer-

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ica. Little girls they were, of my own age, but of a less colored experience. They should have news of these matters. They should be enlightened as to the importance of her with whom they had commonly played visiting-lady and jackstones.

Yet, as the evening drew near, old stirrings of uneasiness made themselves felt dimly, dimly — something, I cannot tell you what, moving on the face of undiscovered waters; a distrust, a shyness and embarrassment that had nothing to do with timidity; a dim sense of disproportion, I take it to have been, and of ancient human questionings.

We waited a little past the usual hour, and then there came a knock. Joseph, our waiter, appeared and bowed gravely. "*Mademoiselle, le dîner est servi.*"

My heart rose and fluttered. Presently we all went down the hall and down the red carpeted stairs, I with my hand in my mother's. I can still feel it resting there. Down the steps we went, my mother and I—I with a little delighted pause and poise at each step, the rest following like a court train. Twelve, and the youngest! Twelve, and the well-beloved

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and proud! Blow, bugles, fine and high! and let those who follow wear scarlet! What more could a little girl ask?

I do not know; I cannot tell you. I only know that, though I would not have admitted it for worlds at the time, when I found myself in the midst of the happiness it was no longer happiness exactly. Not, you understand, that I would have relinquished any of the splendor then. It fascinated me, of course.

Joseph held the door open; a fine heraldic gesture — the flat of his palm against it, the fingers spread, his head flung back, his eyes tributary ahead of him; his whole pose saying, "Stand back! She comes!" Several of the other servants were there, grouped to see and to attend. Madame Blet, in her black dress and perpetual shoulder-cape, — a sad-faced, very dignified woman, with the sadness set aside in my honor for that evening and positive brightness shining from her kind eyes, — stood there too, with welcoming glances. She had decorated the table herself: there it was, a delight of soft lights and snowy linen, wonderful possibilities and flowers.

The dining-room was empty yet bright, as

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are the heavens for the coming of the moon. Joseph stood, not back of my mother's chair, as usual, but back of mine, to see me seated. Those faces, very beloved in the soft light, were turned toward me, a little gay, and happy wholly in my happiness. It was fulfillment of all the dreams of importance I might ever have had.

Then came the unfolding of the gifts. Any one who knew my mother must know that, in the smallest of a nest of lovely little boxes, — just enough of them to produce a certain curiosity and delay, to enhance the final delight, — lay the most lovely little watch, silver-cased (to render it more conformable to my age), and marked with the initials of my name; while on its inner casing it bore proudly, as it still bears, while it ticks here on my table, this inscription: *Victor Fleury, Horloger de la Marine, 23, Rue de la Paix, 23, Paris.*

After the other gifts were opened dinner was served, Joseph bringing everything first to me, whose place it was usually to be served last of all. There were special dishes, and the lamb chops had on particularly fine cravats, and the *petits pois* were so very *petits* that it

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seemed nearly a shame to eat them — like “good little Tootle-tum Teh” in the ballad; and there were side dishes, very special, for the occasion.

Then, as a crowning glory, a dessert not baked in a hotel oven at all; no cabinet pudding of frequent occurrence, nothing that hinted of rice or raisins; no, but something fetched particularly from the *pâtisserie*. By the look of it, it might have been, and probably was, concocted by a pastry cook in full regalia, in that superlative *pâtisserie* on the rue de Rivoli, opposite the Louvre.

It was a tower made of a hard brown candy flecked with chopped nuts. It had a door in it, and windows with embrasures at the tops to make you think of King Arthur and his knights. It was decorated on its platter by saccharine approaches. The tower was open at the top and filled with a flavored whipped cream. Madame Blet, who had, I doubt not, been directing forces from the kitchen, stood now in the doorway beaming like another candle. This, which had the added flavor of being a surprise even to my mother, was Madame Blet's gift to the little American

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mademoiselle. Once more, on a most diminutive scale, France and America were exchanging courtesies.

But meanwhile, — oh, inevitable! — Joseph, that devoted ambassador, beaming unfeigned pride in the behavior of his country, held the tower at my left hand. I was to serve myself first. But how — I ask the heavens to answer me this! — how is one to serve one's self to a feudal tower? One desperate glance at my mother, — the quick dart of an alarmed swallow, — then I took up the large spoon and laid it hesitatingly against the tower's side. But the tower was nearly as hard as the rock it represented. The approaches, also, were of one piece. With a mere dessert spoon, what can be done as to a portcullis! Shall you, do you think, carry off a drawbridge with a slight silver instrument to be held in one hand? I was not meeting the emergency. I was not equal to the occasion. This I knew, with quick intolerable shame. What was to be done? At last, after what seemed to me ages, I accepted the only possibility. I scooped from the top of the tower some of the fluffy whipped cream, put this on my plate and the spoon back among the

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approaches; and the tower, proud, unspoiled, unwon, was carried on to the others, who served themselves, as I had done; or, when the cream was at last too low for them to reach, suffered Joseph to scoop it out for them and put it on their plates.

I sat tasting the whipped cream on the end of my spoon, and oh, it was insipid, that faint froth; not of itself, but by contrast with what I would have wished — a portcullis at the very least. When we left the dining-room, it still stood solid and invulnerable, that so desirable tower, a delusion to the palate, a snare to the understanding, a subtle but strong disappointment to the heart! Now that I look back on it, it seems like an unintended symbol, an uninterpreted writing on the wall of my childhood.

These things called birthdays seemed for me to have been weighed that night in subtle scales, and found wanting. Froth on the tip of your spoon! The real anticipated glory, a chimera; the dreamed-of and so-much-desired happiness, a thing which could not be won, a thing left untouched while one slipped away unsatisfied, disappointed, into the later years.

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No doubt I passed on to later years that very evening as I went out of the lighted dining-room; for more and more this centralizing of power and importance, even though it were for one day of the year only, became to me incongruous and out of the real order of life. As I began to gauge values and proportions better, it came to seem almost a gentle buffoonery. The mild distrust I had felt for birthdays in my little girlhood was beginning to take on the form of positive distaste.

Doubtless I was beginning to have a larger vision of life. For one thing, I had meanwhile seen dawns rise over the Alps, and day depart from the fruitful purple valleys to ascend the heights, beautiful, like the feet of those upon the mountains, who bring tidings of peace; and had watched them pause in their glory for a last look upon the work of their hands before going forth forever beyond the world's edge. And I had stood since then by the incredible sounding sea; I had known that sense of the waters in the hollow of His hand, and watched the night bend like the face of infinity over it.

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Out of the birthdays I have known, I have recorded but three — the three made memorable, not so much by material as by spiritual gifts, and by some vision of life itself vouchsafed me. It was as if, with a touch upon my hand, Life summoned me to note, even though in some unrealized way, when I was but a child of five, how inconsiderable may be these our little personal joys and expectations and vanities of song, even as were mine, in the face of the large solemnities and griefs and remembered joys with which, that day, our home was visited. And on that second birthday, it was as if Life bade me note how satisfying to the heart is the gift of lovely and willing service. Not mine the day at all; but I can remember, all woven in with the ravishing music of harps and violins, a sense of my almost thrilled delight in the service that others brought my sister, in whose honor we were glad, and a high joy in my own eager and devoted homage. Dimly seen in all this, though I could not have named it to you then, was a larger vision, no doubt, of this same truth

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translated into lovelier and more solemn meaning; as if in those lighted rooms, gay with their smilax and their laughter, Life had suddenly laid a touch on my shoulder, and with her finger on her lips had bade me note how sweet is the odor of spikenard, and how thrillingly beautiful are the broken pieces of alabaster.

And the third birthday? Perhaps it was then that Life put into my hand a better gift than any — that larger knowledge, which all the coming years were to corroborate, that to have special gifts and benefits for one's self which are not for others, let the glamour be what it may, is after all but froth and disappointment; and that only the blending of one's life with other lives can ever really satisfy the heart.

Since then I have seen birthdays of my own and others not a few, and have looked on at those of many a child. Witnessing these, I have sometimes been troubled to note how — materialists ourselves — we insist upon making materialists of our children also. For who has not beheld a little lad, triumphant as Jack Horner, in the midst of his birthday packages, or a little Midas, among his heaped-up Christ-

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mas toys, appropriating to himself, with our delighted consent, the Other Child's birthday also. With what shameful abundance of material gifts do we heap the little eager hands; but how few, how few, for the young and growing spirit!

Yet it is to be noted hopefully that our too personal celebrations are apt to fall away, as it were of themselves, in our later years; and doubtless with them many of our central egotisms, life correcting with a patient hand our dull and oftentimes willful behavior. I cannot be persuaded that it is solely a sensitiveness to the loss of youth that prompts us to waive or disregard those birthdays which fall upon the nether side of twenty. Our neglect of them is more often, I like to believe, in the order of a gentle disavowal of old egotisms, as life ripens and takes on in our regard an aspect larger and less personal; even as to a nation or a religion which progresses, egotism and special privilege become increasingly distasteful, and the idea of a chosen people more and more intolerable to the pure in heart, as the world matures.

Mature life, like the mature heart, cannot

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endure a sovereignty over its brethren, but longs for the old original levels; sheds its singleness and its superiorities. We become, God be thanked, less considerable under the moon as time advances; more of a piece with life; better blended with the days; a part of all dawns and sunsets — we who before had but one of each to our credit.

“I own that I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of a day besides my dinner,” says Lamb. “I want a form for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts — a grace before Milton — a grace before Shakespeare — a devotional exercise proper to be said before reading the ‘Fairy Queen’?”

I own also to a disposition to celebrate many birthdays rather than one, and am inclined to be thankful on twenty other occasions in the course of the year besides that one which falls so personally for me — even if so negligible — on a certain February morning. I confess to a love of calendars that sometimes give me two or three great names to celebrate in a single

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day; nor am I ashamed to admit that the sun rises for me the statelier if it be upon an anniversary which commemorates Camoens or Michael Angelo. It has long been my habit, to celebrate quietly in my heart, when all the birds are singing, that day in April when, it is said,—uncertainly enough,—Shakespeare came to the earth; nor have I failed often to note that other day also, when, impartially in the same April weather, it is said, he—and Cervantes on the same day with him—departed from it.

And if such remembrances as these may seem still to tend toward egotism, yet I think that claim can hardly be proved valid. For these,—celebrate them as personally as we may,—these are not men of one season but of all time, blended with all days, impartially a part of all weathers, and of the very fibre and lives of most of us; and, even though we should forget them, yet memorably forgotten in those unforgettable companionships that they have bestowed upon us. These are our stars and moons, differing in glory one from another, with which, in the midst of our mortality, we answer, not ignobly, the shining challenge of

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the stars; these are they innumerable whose beauties and nobilities, coupled with our own inconsiderable lives, lend at last some glory to our days so frail, so ephemeral.

As a child, I used to love to count the stars, beginning with the very first one that pricked its way through the twilit blue, and by a pretty conceit always called that first one my own, and put a most personal wish upon it. For a long time it always stood single in the heavens, and then another here or there, and there, and there, appeared, which I counted with delight. But always the moment came when the count was irretrievably lost; when stars bloomed, not by ones and twos, but by myriads, no more to be counted than the unnumbered sands of the sea; and over me was stretched the jeweled beauty of the infinite heavens, just breathing with the breathing of the night; and I, looking up glorified into that beauty, a little inconsiderable child, standing beside the soft dark shadow of the cypresses.

THE END



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